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THE TARIFF REFORM MOVEMENT IN GREAT BRITAIN

THE TARIFF REFORM MOVEMENT IN GREAT BRITAIN 1881-1895

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By Benjamin H. Brown

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To

My Mother and Father

PREFACE

SOMETIME in 1936, when, as an undergraduate in Columbia College, I first had the good fortune to talk history with Professors Harry Carman, Shepard Clough, and Dwight Miner, the plan for this book emerged. Since that time a good deal of water has passed under the bridge. Countless details have been altered, and here and there an entire chapter has been added or dropped. But the essential idea remains unchanged.

What we had in mind can be briefly stated. Several studies had appeared or were soon to appear, dealing in purely economic or statistical terms with the so-called "Great Depression" which overtook British industry and commerce in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Other histories told the same story on the political plane, describing the steps taken in Britain to control new forces and to heal old wounds. Between these two approaches appeared a gap which we determined ought to be filled. How did ordinary Englishmen—entrepreneurs and laborers, in the cities and on the farms—react to the economic changes? How did they formulate their views? How did they organize themselves for political action? What steps did they take to put their remedies before the public? What happened to these proposed remedies when, cast adrift in the welter of debate, they reinforced or collided with or glanced off other opinions more or less forcibly expressed, more or less the true expression of what men's judgment or interest or prejudice led them to believe were the necessities of the time? What means were used to elect friendly members of Parliament, to persuade members already elected, to translate opinion into policy? The gap was a large one, and only here and there had attempts been made to fill it. My own subsequent work is merely exploratory. At best, it will throw a little light on methods and sources which abler hands will turn to good account.

To my way of thinking, it matters very little that I have chosen as the theme of this work the attempts to install protective tariffs in

Britain in the fifteen years following 1881. The same type of study might be made of agitations for old age pensions in Italy, for new canals in France, or, I daresay, for state protection of the donkey caravans in old Mesopotamia. What matters, I think, is the knowledge gained of that twilight region between economic circumstances and the formation of political and social policies. The economist notes falling profit margins, shrinking investment opportunities, faltering exports, "depression," "lack of confidence"—call it what you will. The historian notes tariffs, subsidies, imperialist expansion, curtailment of civil liberties, racial discrimination, perhaps revoluton. What lies between? Did faltering exports *cause* the tariff? Did "depression" *cause* imperialist expansion? If not, what other factors helped shape the result? It is worthwhile, I think, to ask these questions, because in the long run the success or failure of the democratic idea might depend on our knowledge of the innermost workings of the democratic process and on our ability to use that knowledge to meet human needs.

These might seem unduly grave reflections to attach to a dissertation on the tariff reform movement in England. I make them, at the risk of arousing too great expectations, because, in all honesty, I have had them in mind throughout the writing of this book, and because I believe that even modest histories honestly written can yield great lessons.

I say that the theme tariff reform is of secondary importance, but that is only because I think that some things are more important than others. After all, it is only a hop, a skip, and a jump from these early tariff reformers to the Ottawa Conference of 1932, where their ideas formed the basis of an imperial policy which will shape our grandchildren's lives as well as ours. I have chosen 1881 as the starting point, because the formation of the National Fair Trade League in that year made tariffs a live issue in England for the first time in almost a generation. I have stopped, somewhat abruptly, at 1895, because with the accession of Joseph Chamberlain to the Colonial Office in that year, it seemed to me that the preliminary work of tariff reformers had been accomplished and that their success or failure depended thereafter on the ability of one man to carry the country with him. At one time, it was my intention to write a postscript on Chamberlain, but when the rough draft began

to rival the remainder of the book in length, the plan was abandoned. Readers interested in Chamberlain will have no difficulty in finding their way to books which describe his role far more adequately than could any single chapter of mine.

The material is arranged so that the reader must traverse the ground between 1881 and 1895 some five or six times by parallel routes. One chapter deals with tariff reform and labor, another with tariff reform and imperialism, another with tariff reform and the Conservative Party, and so on—all for the entire fifteen year period. Each chapter tells its own story and in a way stands on its own legs. This arrangement seemed inevitable to me once I had scratched the surface of the subject. Looking back, I am satisfied with it save in two respects. For one thing, the sense of the simultaneity of certain events has undoubtedly been lost. For another thing, Chapter V, or the parts of it which analyze the popular strength of the tariff reform movement, might have been more suitably placed earlier in the book. I chose to leave it where it is, because it was not my main purpose to count heads, and whether I liked it or not, no satisfactory record of the count existed. Here again, however, something has undoubtedly been lost. It may well be that some readers will prefer to glance at Chapter V immediately after Chapter I.

The pleasure of seeing one's first book safe between the covers at last is not to be denied. It is exceeded, however, by the pleasure of publicly thanking the good friends who have helped at every stage in the preparation. I have already mentioned Professors Carman, Clough, and Miner. And there are others. Most of the research had to be done abroad. The late Dean Herbert E. Hawkes of Columbia College made it possible for me to spend six terms at Clare College, Cambridge; and yet my obligation to him is so large that even that dream come true seems but a trifling part of the whole. In England I ran up other debts. Those who know Professor J. H. Clapham, Mr. C. R. Fay, Mr. Hrothgar Habakkuk, and Professor M. M. Postan will understand me when I say that they can never be repaid. Mr. J. E. Tyler of the University of Sheffield made suggestions for the improvement of the chapter on imperialism and had the kindness to take down and send me the notes from the Mundella papers which appear here and there throughout the

book. I am indebted to Lieutenant Nathan Pelcovits for the use of his notes on the Manchester Chamber of Commerce MSS; to Miss Friedl Gartner for important reconnaissance in London libraries; and to both for encouragement when it was needed most. The writing was done in moments spared or borrowed or stolen from my teaching at Columbia University. Without the civilizing influence of Professors J. B. Brebner and R. L. Schuyler, it might never have been fit to print.

B.H.B.

Naval Air Technical Training Center
Millington, Tennessee
June, 1943

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I

ORIGINS

THE OBJECT of this essay is to show that between 1881, when the National Fair Trade League was formed, and 1895, when Joseph Chamberlain became Colonial Secretary, the essential points of Chamberlain's later tariff reform movement gained wide currency in Great Britain; that this was largely the work of manufacturers who suffered from foreign competition and foreign tariffs and who desired various forms of protection, retaliation, and reciprocity; that considerable support came from farmers and from groups agitating for countervailing duties against foreign bounties; that the Conservative Party gave serious attention to all these demands and would indeed have given more had not the alliance with Liberal Unionists imposed strict limits on Conservative policy; that the rising imperialism of the eighties and nineties and the overtures of colonial statesmen converted what was at first a movement for protection pure and simple into a movement for imperial preferential tariffs; and that in the end Joseph Chamberlain had merely to put himself at the head of a sizable following which had long been seeking a leader of his stature and had in fact already singled him out as the likely candidate. Attention will be fixed primarily upon the leaders of the Fair Trade movement, as it was called, upon their motives in taking up the question, and upon the methods which they adopted to put their views before the people and Parliament. No attempt will be made to measure the results in terms of "public opinion"; nor is it the intention of this essay to seek any close relationship between price curves, business cycles, discount rates on the one hand, and protection, reciprocity, retaliation, imperial preference on the other. It will be clear as we proceed that the circumstances which gave these years the name Great Depression are also closely related to demands for tariff reform. But this is only part, though an important

part, of the picture. Men became protectionists usually because they wanted to secure their bread and butter; but often because they were Conservatives and wanted ammunition to snipe at Liberals; often because they believed in the empire; and sometimes, indeed, because they revered their grandfathers or were members of the Church of England.

EARLY PROTESTS AGAINST FREE TRADE

Whatever their motives, protectionists had a formidable task before them. Free trade had taken a remarkable hold in Britain, and with it had come unparalleled prosperity. The work of Huskisson, Peel, Gladstone, "again Gladstone and shadows of Gladstone like Northcote," [1] had put Britain in a position which no kingdom had occupied "since kings first took presents from visiting merchants or blackmailed the caravans." [2] The essence of the position was this: no *protective* duties, that is to say, no duties on imported goods which competed with goods made at home; but only pure *revenue* duties, that is, duties on goods *not* made at home.[3] After the signing of the Cobden treaty with France in 1860, although a few items remained on the lists, the work of dismantling Britain's old protective system had been largely completed. Food and raw materials had been freed earlier; 1860 saw the end, for all practical purposes, "of all duties on manufactures—including silks which had continued to enjoy the exceptional rate of 15%." [4] The prosperity which accompanied these measures was almost beyond the imagination. "In the twenty-three years between 1850 and 1873 Great Britain was the forge of the world, the world's carrier, the world's ship-builder, the world's banker, the world's workshop, the world's clearing house, the world's entrepôt. The trade of the world during this period pivoted on Great Britain." [5]

It need hardly be said that the basic cause of this prosperity was not free trade. Britain had attained industrial preëminence while continental nations were settling their differences with Napoleon

[1] J. H. Clapham, *Economic History of Modern Britain*, II, 242.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 244.

[3] So that even at the height of free trade, Britain raised a huge revenue by tariffs—something like a quarter of her total revenue, in fact—C. J. Fuchs, *The Trade Policy of Great Britain and Her Colonies*, p. 15.

[4] C. R. Fay, *Great Britain from Adam Smith to the Present Day*, p. 72.

[5] L. C. A. Knowles, *Commercial and Industrial Revolutions in Great Britain*, p. 139.

and while America was settling her continent; vast accumulations of capital, supplies of raw materials, and a merchant marine second to none had carried her well into the nineteenth century with an unchallengeable lead over all competitors; the adoption of free trade had merely released her full energies. But the coincidence of this breath-taking prosperity with the gradual abandonment of the protective system placed a heavy burden of proof upon those who desired to restore the protective system. There was a widespread belief that, whatever the circumstances in which a nation found itself, whatever policies were adopted in other countries, whatever the political outlook might be, free trade was always right and protection, in the words of John Bright, "a stupid and impossible proposition." [6] When, after the collapse of the commercial treaty system of the sixties, it dawned upon Britain that other nations were by no means prepared to abandon protection, the belief persisted. Said the *Times* on March 24, 1881, for example:

> It will, no doubt be one of the great puzzles for future historians to explain the strange tenacity with which intelligent and civilized nations have clung to this doctrine. It has been refuted in the United States, for example, as completely as here. . . . And yet protection was never much stronger in America than it is now. It is a terrible rebuke to the labours of economists, to the Cobden Club, and similar agencies of enlightenment, that they have not visibly weakened that great economical heresy.

When retaliation was demanded against protectionist France, the *Times* was unmoved. "Protection, as we well know, brings its own punishment," said a leading article. "We are safe, therefore, in leaving its adherents to the stern teaching of facts. *Nature will retaliate upon France whether we do so or not.*" [7] Even as late as 1890, it was said that to criticize free imports was "a very hazardous enterprise."

> The man who launches out upon it is instantly attacked by all the "statisticians" and political economists with the biggest bludgeons they can find, and it will be a lucky thing for him if it is not soon proved that he is not only destitute of reason and common sense, but that his moral character has some ugly flaws in it, and that it is exceedingly doubtful whether he ought to be at large.[8]

[6] Birmingham *Daily Post,* Sept. 14, 1881. [7] *Times,* Sept. 2, 1881. Italics mine.
[8] *Nineteenth Century,* quoted in R. J. S. Hoffman, *Great Britain and the Anglo-German Trade Rivalry,* p. 45.

All this, of course, came when questions were being asked and Cobdenites had to justify themselves. But in 1866, when the Cobden Club was formed, it was thought that the new society would be purely commemorative, not, as it later turned out, a fighting instrument. "In Mr. Gladstone's speech in the chair at the first of the club's dinners . . . there was not one word to indicate . . . that any controversy existed . . . in this country on the question of Free Trade." [9] If there was any controversy, it was between those who stood by Britain's existing tariff position and those who wanted to advance farther in the direction of free trade, to the point even of repealing revenue duties. A few extremists argued that Britain's prosperity could never reach its fullest flower "until the ports and harbours of the United Kingdom are thrown open as freely and widely as the entrances of traders' shops and warehouses." [10]

Yet a combing of the record yields up isolated bits of evidence that doubts were being raised even during the heydey of free trade. As early as 1856 a pamphlet was turned out from the pen of one Richard Burn, and published in Manchester, of all places, foreshadowing with astonishing accuracy some of the arguments which were to occur ever more frequently as the years wore on.[11] The growing adverse balance of trade, the growing percentage of raw materials and machinery in Britain's total exports, the increasing dependence on foreign food supplies, the importation of every cheap product from boys' marbles to four-post bedsteads, while British artisans were out of employment, and the principle of taxing only those imports which did *not* compete with British products—these were the objects of Burn's criticism. It does not appear that he had any special axe to grind; that sort of protest did not come until the sixties. In 1865 it was said that Mr. Treherne, M.P. for Coventry, won great popularity among the ribbon weavers of his community for his protests against the Cobden treaty and demands for protection against French ribbons; at a by-election in the same year the Tory candidate, H. W. Eaton, took a similar stand.[12] After ribbons it was silk, gloves, and watches; especially silk, an industry which declined rapidly after the removal of the

[9] Richard Gowing, *Richard Cobden*, p. 4.

[10] John Noble, *The Possibility of Entirely Repealing All Duties*, p. 5; see also John Noble, *National Finance*.

[11] Richard Burn, *The Darkening Cloud*.

[12] *Times*, June 16, 1865.

last duty in 1860.[13] An article in the *Bullionist* of December 21, 1866, asked for justice to all three. The Manchester school, it was said, had thought only of the consumer, not at all of the producer; neglecting the fact that with the exception of the disabled and the very rich, virtually all consumers were producers and could not consume if they had no jobs; neglecting, too, that the foreigner, after routing British competitors with cheap imports, could knife the consumer by raising prices at will. The working class, added the writer significantly, would surely put matters right if it got the vote.

After 1867, the year of the second Reform Bill, it was found that there was a grain of truth in what the *Bullionist* writer had said about the working class. There was some fear among Liberals that Tory protectionists would try to turn the new voters against free trade; and when the newly formed Conservative Working Men's Associations held a great banquet at the Crystal Palace, it appeared that such might very well be the case. The culprits were Lord John Manners, Chief Commissioner of Public Works, and a Mr. Pittman of Greenwich, who called for the immediate undoing of Sir Robert Peel's tariffs.[14]

In 1869, when trade was slack and emigration of British workers to the new world perceptibly increased, the Association of the "Revivers" of British Industry was formed. "There is room for us all in Great Britain, if we would look upon ourselves as one family," said one of their leaflets; "let us forget prejudices; let us be just before we are generous; let us be patriotic first, Cosmopolitan when we are able." [15] The aim of the Revivers was to enlist 100,000 workmen to petition Parliament for "a re-modelling of the Customs' Tariff concerning Foreign Vessels and Foreign Manufactured Goods that CAN be made in this country, also proposals concerning the British Colonies carefully avoiding interference with food or Raw Materials." [16] England had been generous long enough, said the *Manifesto;* foreign nations had proved to be "so greedy that they will not treat us in a similarly liberal spirit, so the "REVIVERS" propose to stop their little game"; as a result, it was fondly hoped, "THEIR PEOPLE would

[13] See R. C. Rawlley, *Silk Industry.* [14] *Financial Reformer,* Dec. 1, 1867.

[15] Association of the "Revivers" of British Industry, *To the People of England.*

[16] Association of the "Revivers" of British Industry, *Manifesto.* Hereafter cited merely as *Manifesto.*

be out of employment." The president, a certain James Roberts, urged workmen to support Tory candidates prepared to protect British labor; as against Liberals like A. J. Mundella, who had moved his factory to Saxony, where labor was cheap, and who was therefore marked as "one of the most . . . important enemies that has arisen against the interests of the British workman." [17] Richard Burn reappeared, reminding workers that while Liberals had freed every article that the manufacturing class desired, they had not touched the duties on tea, coffee, and sugar, which constituted an important part of the people's food.[18] At about the same time, two Tory M.P.'s, C. N. Newdegate, a hard-shelled old protectionist of the Bentinck school, and A. Staveley Hill, who later assisted Fair Traders, became active in the movement.[19]

Several matters stand out in the Revivers' agitation. The industries most frequently singled out as needing protection were clocks and watches, straw hats and bonnets, boots and shoes, gloves, silks and ribbons, woolens and worsteds, shipping, and iron. The towns they singled out were Macclesfield, Coventry, Spitalfields, Preston, Manchester, Derby, and Nottingham—all of which continued for many years to be centers of protectionist agitation. Their greatest indignation was reserved for the French and the French treaty; the expiration of which, due in 1870 (unless renewed), was regarded as the great opportunity to get on with their policy.[20] The "adverse balance of trade" was frequently mentioned, of course; as was the need for a parliamentary inquiry into the depression—which remained a favorite theme of "reciprocitarians" and Fair Traders until the great inquiry of 1886.[21] It is notable, too, that in all the literature of the Revivers there was a studied effort to avoid that old bugbear of British politics, the "dear loaf." It was admitted, indeed, that duties "on corn and breadstuffs, and in fact on provisions of any kind, would be attended with the most disastrous results." [22] Later protectionists welcomed the support of farmers and

[17] James Roberts, *Free Trade a Gigantic Mistake,* pp. 30–39.

[18] A Manchester Man (R. Burn?), *The . . . Stagnation of Trade.* R. Burn was responsible for the introduction at least; he signed it.

[19] John Noble, *Our Imports and Exports,* pp. 39–43.

[20] Burn, *The . . . Stagnation of Trade;* and G. Wray, *Depression of Trade and the French Treaty.*

[21] See below, pp. 62–64.

[22] John Noble, *Free Trade,* p. 17; also Roberts, *op. cit.,* p. 28.

skirted the problem of the "dear loaf" as best they could. The fact was that in the sixties the farmers were not yet ready to step up to the firing line.[23] Lastly, it should be mentioned that most of the Revivers, setting what was to prove a popular fashion among tariff reformers, were fond of quoting Adam Smith and usually insisted that their aim was to secure *real* free trade, as against one-sided free trade. The *Manifesto,* however, made a revealing slip in this connection. By adopting a policy of reciprocity, it was said, "we should so paralyze foreign manufacturers, that we should exact Free Trade in six months"; but after that "we must take our chances, *unless our rulers of those days see fit to continue the 'Revivers' policy.*" [24]

It is not likely that the Revivers ever reached a large audience. A meeting was held at the Corn Exchange in Preston in August, 1869, with the Lord Mayor in the chair; between 600 and 800 people attended, including some of the principal manufacturers of the town.[25] Two weeks later there was another meeting at the Clarence Hotel in Manchester; one of the speakers was a Mr. Chapman, a cotton broker of Liverpool.[26] In December there was still another, at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester, at which Newdegate and Hill were present.[27] Then, seemingly, the movement died. Tories denied that they had encouraged the Revivers; but that is as it may be.[28]

The following year a circular appeared announcing the formation of a Fiscal Reform League to obtain "a modification of the Income Tax on precarious incomes, a reduction of taxes on articles of first necessity, such as Tea, Sugar, Coffee, Malt, etc.; and . . . the adoption of moderate duties on foreign manufactures for the purpose of revenue." All "noblemen, gentlemen, and working men of all political parties willing to co-operate" [29] were invited to communicate with the Secretary; but whether they did or no, and in what numbers, we have not the evidence to decide.

[23] "The landed interest . . . is now by far the most prosperous in the country; and I doubt whether in any part of the three kingdoms any considerable number of landlords or tenants could now be rallied to the cry of Protection to Corn." Sir Edward Sullivan, *Protection to Native Industry,* p. 32.

[24] Italics mine; see also Noble, *Free Trade,* p. 26; Roberts, *Free Trade a Gigantic Mistake,* pp. 29–30; Burn, *The . . . Stagnation of Trade,* pp. 36–37.

[25] *Times,* Aug. 28, 1869. [26] *Ibid.,* Sept. 15, 1869.

[27] John Noble, *Our Imports and Exports,* pp. 39–43.

[28] Sullivan, *Protection to Native Industry,* p. 136.

[29] *Financial Reformer,* May 1, 1870.

The great forward movement of protectionism did not start until the seventies, and that after the middle of the decade. Its course can be traced in the columns of the *Foreign Times,* a journal for commercial travelers and traders appearing weekly during the ten years following November, 1871.[30] The *Foreign Times* it would seem, was the first periodical to launch a sustained attack on Britain's policy of "one-sided Free Trade." One suspects that it was the organ of the so-called Reciprocity Free Trade Association, which began to hold meetings in London at about the same time that the first numbers appeared. One of the editors, John Sangster, was a leader in the Association; closely connected with both enterprises were J. M. Hyde, who later turned up among Fair Traders, and Captain Bedford Pim, an irrepressible quixotic whose eccentricity and zeal later brought the protectionist movement into ill repute.[31] Pim, formerly of Her Majesty's Navy, then a barrister and M.P., was during the seventies involved in railroad promotion schemes in British Honduras.

The *Foreign Times* did not underestimate the task of persuading Britain to change her fiscal ways in 1871: "English trade and commerce must suffer bitterly for years," it was said, "before the hard lesson will be taught to our rulers." No hard and fast program was formulated. For the present it was enough to inveigh perfunctorily against Cobdenism and all it stood for and to remind Conservatives that they had a glorious protectionist tradition behind them. Then in 1874 a note of urgency creeps in. On August 22, a serious trade decline is noted. The *Foreign Times* hazards the prediction that after the false prosperity following the Franco-German War, British industry will be depressed as long as the Government refuses to retaliate against nations which shut their markets to British goods. On September 5 Tories are urged to take up the question at once. Two years pass; there is scarcely any mention of tariffs. Then in October, 1876, appears another plea for help from the Tories, and after that appeals for protection, protection, protection, every week, week in and week out, until the small voice of the *Foreign Times* is lost in a greater tumult.

[30] The *Foreign Times* contained articles in three languages—English, French, and Spanish.

[31] See below, p. 35.

Mark the turning point—1876. The Great Depression was two years old. "Apprehensions of foreign competition . . . haunt us," said the London *Times* on December 11. The wholesale price curve had started its gloomy trend downward, heading for 1896, twenty years away! [32] Export values, falling steadily, were to reach 181 millions sterling in 1879 as against 256 millions for 1872. Exports of railway iron and steel were at the bottom of the trough.[33] Could it have been that Captain Bedford Pim's Honduran venture was faring poorly? If so, he was no less fortunate than others. Remarked a writer in *Fraser's Magazine:*

> For the first time almost since the new order of physical progress came to the fore there has been a stoppage of foreign demand. . . . Progress appears to have reached for the time its limit. . . . We may get out of this depression with undiminished prestige; but we can hardly get out of it soon, and, before we do, the trade position of this country toward other countries may be decidedly altered.[34]

SPREAD OF PROTECTIONISM AFTER 1877

After 1877, protection was part of England's table talk. "What a number of old ladies around the abode of the Old Lady of Threadneedle Street!" exclaimed *Punch*. "The protectionist panic of these old ladies, however, too clearly shows that, whatever progress they may have been making in the commercial world, they have anything but advanced in their knowledge of business." [35] And the *Echo* of London murmured: "It is strange, after thirty years of silence, to hear—issuing as it were from the tomb—the assertions and the fallacies . . . which most people supposed were buried beyond hope of resurrecting." [36] At Cambridge, Professor Fawcett devoted a series of lectures to exposing these fallacies in their true light.[37] It was an opportunity which any good Liberal would have welcomed. "I wish it could be arranged for the Chamber of Commerce to invite an address on 'Reciprocity,'" Mundella wrote a friend. "I think I could explode that nonsense." [38]

The nonsense was, indeed, everywhere. Lord Bateman had spread

[32] Clapham, *Economic History of Modern Britain*, II, 378. [33] *Ibid.*, p. 227.
[34] *Fraser's Magazine*, Sept., 1876, quoted in Hoffman, *Great Britain and the Anglo-German Trade Rivalry*, p. 15.
[35] Quoted in *Monetary Gazette*, Jan. 19, 1879.
[36] Quoted in *Financial Reformer*, Dec. 1, 1878.
[37] *Monetary Gazette*, Oct. 27, 1877. [38] Mundella MSS, Nov. 26, 1878.

it generously in a letter to the *Times* in November, 1877, asking for "limited reciprocity." [39] After thirty years of trial, he complained, all England had was one-sided free trade.

> Our overtures to other countries are disregarded; our commercial treaties are not renewed; our own trade is in a sinking and unprofitable condition; our exports show a lamentable, alarming, and increasing deficit; our Exchequer is affected; and, worse than all, not a single country in Europe . . . can be cajoled by the most specious temptation into following our example of free imports. . . . I ask whether that grave moment of reflection and self-examination has not now arrived when it behooves all classes who feel themselves sensibly affected, to pause and seriously review the present position; and if a false step has been made, as many think, to have the courage and the energy to retrace it without delay.

Lord Bateman's letter let the floodgates down: the Bradford *Chronicle and Mail,* Bradford *Observer,* Yorkshire *Post,* Burnley *Advertiser,* Stamford *Mercury,* Sheffield *Daily Telegraph,* Manchester *Courier,* Oldham *Standard, Morning Post, Globe, St. James's Gazette,* and *Daily Telegraph* were only a few of the papers which opened their columns to protectionist correspondence, and some made Bateman's proposals part and parcel of their editorial policy. The same was true of the fashionable reviews: the *Quarterly, Fortnightly, Nineteenth Century, Fraser's Magazine.* And on top of this a deluge of protectionist pamphlets appeared.

Clearly, free trade was losing some of its charm. Chambers of Commerce in Sheffield, Bradford, Bristol, Dewsbury, and Huddersfield—to name only a few—were questioning it. A typical debate in Bristol resulted in the defeat, by 14 votes to 11, of a resolution to the effect that "as no foreign nation will at present receive our goods duty free, we should impose a duty on their manufactures." [40] The Huddersfield Chamber, on the other hand, protested against foreign tariffs and asked that relations between the mother country and the Colonies be examined "with the view of steps being taken to place these relations upon a more satisfactory basis." [41] The Associated Chambers of Commerce sent a deputation to the Foreign Office asking the Government to take up the question of

[39] Bateman, *Lord Bateman's Plea for Limited Reciprocity.* Reprinted from the *Times* of Nov. 12, 1877.

[40] Bradford *Chronicle and Mail,* Dec. 20, 1878; *Financial Reformer,* Jan. 1, 1879.

[41] *Financial Reformer,* May 1, 1879.

prohibitory duties in supposedly friendly countries; but later decisively defeated a resolution demanding retaliatory duties.[42] In Wolverhampton, Birmingham, and Coventry, influential manufacturers formed committees to agitate for reciprocity.[43] The Lord Mayor of London received a petition with over 200 signatures asking for a meeting at the Guildhall to discuss the trade question "with a view, if necessary, of modifying our present so-called Free Trade system." [44]

The storm center was Bradford. Here the worsted trade was greatly depressed: tariffs in the United States and Germany had had a disastrous effect, and in English feminine fashions there was an unhappy "turn of the beam" in favor of soft French woolens. "I can get a very delightful dress of French make," wrote one lady, "for about half what I should have to pay for the most dreadful looking thing from Bradford." [45] Facing the crisis heroically, the Countess of Bective formed a "Buy British League" and wrote a pamphlet urging English ladies to join; a Bradford committee promptly took 6,000 copies.[46] When the Lady and her Earl visited the town, "the public buildings and principal warehouses . . . had been decorated with such profusion as almost to impart the semblance of a Royal visit to the occasion." [47]

The fall in exports was the chief source of alarm.

> Our trade with America has fallen from four millions to 1,200,000 a year and with Germany the fall is, if anything, greater. These countries used to be our best customers, but now, by the aid of high protective duties, they manufacture nearly all they require. . . . Unless the nations of Europe and the United States can be induced to treat with us on fair terms . . . our foreign trade, as regards Bradford, is doomed to decay.[48]

S. Cunliffe Lister and J. H. Mitchell, both wealthy manufacturers, broached the subject of protection at the Chamber of Commerce, and, finding themselves in a minority, appealed to public opinion

[42] Bradford *Chronicle and Mail,* Feb. 28, 1878. *Foreign Times,* March 2, 1878. *British Empire,* Sept. 6, 1879.

[43] *Financial Reformer,* Sept. 1, 1878.

[44] *Monetary Gazette,* Jan. 18, 1879. *Financial Reformer,* Feb. 1, 1879.

[45] Letter signed "A Thoughtful Daughter," *Daily Telegraph,* Aug. 20, 1881.

[46] Alice Maria Taylor, Countess of Bective, *The British Woolen Trade.* See also *Times,* Aug. 11, 1881; *Wool and Textile Fabrics,* Sept. 17 and 24, 1881.

[47] Bradford *Observer,* Sept. 20, 1881.

[48] Bradford *Chronicle and Mail,* Aug. 9, 1877.

at a mass meeting in St. George's Hall. Lister, whose workmen were quarrelsome, argued that England could not afford better working conditions than France as long as French products entered the British market duty free. Some were convinced; some were not. But the suggestion was provocative, and raised a storm of meetings and letters to the editors of local papers. Bradford, as the *Economist* said, was indeed "the cradle of Fair Trade." [49]

Meanwhile, what of the farmers? "It is evident," said the *Financial Reformer* in 1879, "that in the agricultural districts there is great need for enlightenment with respect to the principles of political economy. The generation that was educated by the Anti-Corn Law League has passed away, and it seems as if the work of that organization will have to be done over again before the ghost of protection is finally laid." [50] At a stock show in Louth the chairman declared that "something ought to be done at once to protect our native industry"; and at a Spalding agricultural meeting a speaker urged farmers to unite on the question: "If all advocated protection with a determination to have it, they would get it." [51] The Duke of Rutland, calling for 5*s*. on American wheat, asked his listeners to settle the matter "at the next general election." [52] And a lesser farmer echoed his recommendation in a letter to the Stamford *Mercury:* "I say to my brother farmers . . . make this a hustings question; extract a pledge from your candidate; sink all minor differences, and vote only for the man who will support the repeal of this iniquitous free trade." [53] The Lincolnshire Chamber of Agriculture passed a resolution demanding protective duties on corn and wheat.[54] Farmers' meetings at Essex, Bethnal Green, and Birkenhead took similar action.[55]

So far the question was one mainly of protection; protection for silk or woolens or hardware or wheat; or against Germany, France, or the United States, depending on where you lived and in what trade you were engaged. Very early, however, the discussion of protective tariffs broadened into a discussion of imperial tariff

[49] *Economist,* Nov. 19, 1881.

[50] *Financial Reformer,* Jan. 1, 1879. For the most cogent arguments favoring agricultural protection at this time, see Henry Chaytor, *Agriculture and the Trade Depression.* On the other side, I. S. Leadam, *Farmer's Grievances.*

[51] *Financial Reformer,* Jan. 1, 1879.

[52] *Ibid.,* Oct. 1, 1879.

[53] Quoted in *ibid.,* Jan. 1, 1879.

[54] *Ibid.,* April 1, 1879.

[55] *Foreign Times,* Aug. 16, Sept. 27, and Nov. 8, 1879.

preference. As everyone must have known, it was the sheerest make-believe to argue that Britain, in this new day and age, could plan seriously to become independent of overseas sources of supply; and, as more than one protectionist candidate learned, it was to many well-fed voters a dreary kind of make-believe at that. A self-sufficient Empire was something else again, at once more practicable and more appealing. Many Englishmen, watching the shadow of Bismarck grow large over Europe, were rediscovering the merits of the old imperial system, which had rested, in large measure, on differential tariffs. The identification of the two questions took place as easily as the coupling of cars. As one tariff reformer put it, the patriotic and the economic questions were simply one and indivisible.

Skeptics were entitled to wonder, however, if events had not moved too far downstream to justify talk of restoring the old preferential system. Canada now had autonomy in tariff matters, and by the adoption of Macdonald's National Policy in 1879 had reared a forbidding wall against British as well as foreign goods. Her markets were, on the whole, no more accessible to the British trader than the German or American markets. It took two parties to make a tariff bargain: was Canada willing?

These doubts were settled somewhat, though not entirely, by various Canadian spokesmen taking active part in the tariff reform movement in Britain. One of the earliest was Sir Alexander Galt, the first Canadian High Commissioner in London. Speaking at a meeting of the Associated Chambers of Commerce in 1879, Galt explained that although Canada had been forced by the prohibitory policy of the United States to erect tariffs in self-defense, "there is not a colonist in the British Empire who would not rejoice to see its entire trade arranged on such terms as would produce practical free trade within itself. Commercial Union is practicable, and can be achieved by British statesmen whenever they are convinced of its wisdom." [56] In 1880, before leaving Canada to take up the duties of High Commissioner, Galt said publicly that

> the Free Trade policy of England has . . . proved a failure, and that the people of England are now awakening to the fact that they have within their own dominions a market larger than that which the foreign

[56] *Ibid.* Oct. 25, 1879.

countries can ever give them; that it only requires a wise policy on their part, and combined action on ours, to make the Empire independent of foreign countries for everything it requires.

The unemployment, or, as some preferred, the overpopulation of England, could also be relieved.

> At the same time that we are on the eve of opening up that vast country, which will give England a full supply of wheat, the necessities of England . . . render it of the utmost importance that she should find a new home for the suffering thousands who are anxious to leave and must emigrate unless she desires to have a social revolution in her midst.[57]

At about the same time, the Dominion Board of Trade of Canada deputed one of its members, R. R. Dobell, to start a movement for a conference of Imperial Chambers of Commerce "for the purpose of drawing closer the trade relations between Great Britain and her colonies." "We had the greatest difficulty in getting a meeting," said Dobell: "there was nobody whom we could ask to appoint delegates to meet us." But out of his efforts was born the London Chamber of Commerce, host to the later congresses of imperial chambers.[58]

The importance of Canada's part in the tariff reform movement can hardly be overemphasized. In the negotiations leading to the establishment of the post of High Commissioner in London, the Canadian delegates, Macdonald, Tupper, and Tilley, confidentially told the Colonial Minister that although Canada was forced to resort to protection for revenue and for retaliation against the United States, she nevertheless wanted "to restore the greatly diminished trade with Great Britain and the West Indian Islands. . . . The Government of Canada are prepared . . . to give distinct trade advantages to Great Britain, as against foreign countries, and they sought to do so in their arrangement of the present tariff." [59] The Canadians had high hopes for their "project of reviving the old system of imperial tariff preferences," for the depression in England gave no promise of lifting, and they thought that some Conservatives, like Salisbury, showed "strong Fair Trade leanings." [60]

[57] *Foreign Times,* May 1, 1880. O. D. Skelton, *Sir Alexander Galt,* pp. 528–30.

[58] *Journal of the Royal Colonial Institute,* Vol. XXV, No. 7, May 8, 1894; *Foreign Times,* Jan. 1, 1881.

[59] E. M. Saunders (ed.), *Sir Charles Tupper,* I, 273–75.

[60] Skelton, *op. cit.,* pp. 525–28.

But these signs of the time were misleading, as Galt was to discover when he arrived in London. If Conservatives leaned toward reciprocity, the mass of Englishmen did not; and they said so at the polls in 1880. "With all the people I meet," Galt wrote Macdonald, "the Liberal victory is regarded as a reindorsement of the existing form of Free Trade." [61] And again, to Tilley: "We can scarcely hope to have as friendly a Government to deal with as that which is about to pass away." [62] When the Liberal Government assumed office, he found that Dilke, negotiating for renewal of the French treaty, was alone sympathetic. "Strange as it may seem, I found he leaned to the Reciprocity heresy. . . . He quite laughed, however, at the prospect of Gladstone consenting to anything of the kind." [63] But Galt did not surrender easily. "Of course I shall not suggest a *Zollverein* to them, *for the present!*" he wrote in May. "If I can get them committed to aid Emigration, it will be the thin end of the wedge." [64]

GROWTH OF PROTECTIONIST SOCIETIES

In this fertile ground, protectionist clubs and leagues sprouted freely. The oldest, the Reciprocity Free Trade Association, has already been mentioned. It is worth noting, however, that in 1879 the Association quickened the pace of its activity; held weekly meetings at the Queen's Head Hotel; and developed, for the first time, a keen interest in the Empire.[65] An address was sent to the Governor-General and to both houses of the Canadian Parliament urging a scheme of preference as regards the mother country.[66] A branch formed in the East End of London brought protectionist arguments to the laboring classes, and in the election of 1880 speakers were sent up and down the country to support "friends of native industry" standing for Parliament. After the election, a petition sent to the House of Commons showed how "one-sided Free Trade" had wrecked large sections of British industry.[67]

Another organization with similar aims, though perhaps with a more obvious political bias, was formed by Lord Bateman shortly after his celebrated letter appeared in the *Times*. It was called at

[61] *Ibid.*, p. 533. [62] *Ibid.*, p. 529. [63] *Ibid.*, pp. 533–34. [64] *Ibid.*, p. 531.
[65] *Foreign Times,* March 15, 1879; *British Empire,* Sept. 20, 1879.
[66] *Foreign Times,* Jan. 17, 1880; *British Empire,* Sept. 20, 1879.
[67] *Foreign Times,* June 5, 1880.

first the Conservative Protectionist Association, but later became the National Society for the Defense of British Industries. The secretary, a certain George Rose, appealed through advertisements in the press to "all Conservatives interested in the important question of Free Trade or limited protection recently raised by Lord Bateman"; but apparently the result was unsatisfactory, for after strutting a brief hour, the Society would seem to have left the stage.[68]

Lord Bateman's creation was succeeded by the National and Patriotic League for the Protection of British Interests, formed to combat "the disastrous fiscal legislation of the generation now passing away." [69] The League apparently intended to carry the question to the workers, for its first act was to convene a meeting at Hyde Park. There the secretary, R. H. Armit, though perhaps he spoke what was in the hearts of many protectionists, spoke a little too plain and bold; his mission, he said, was to end "the Bright-Gladstone Free Trade bastard policy." [70] This was strong music for Victorian ears, and Armit's hour on the stage was even briefer than Lord Bateman's.

The next year, at a meeting of 200 "bankers, merchants, and others" at the Canon Street Hotel in London, the National Industrial Defense Association was formed.[71] Its leader: C. W. Stokes. Its aim, as announced in the *Times:* "to avert national ruin by taxing foreign agriculturists and manufacturers to the relief of those British taxes on malt, etc., and income, which enhance the price of British food and manufactures." [72] Its history: fleeting.

This mushroom growth of protectionist leagues spread to Birmingham, Sheffield, Wolverhampton, and other manufacturing centers.[73] Of these provincial attempts, the Birmingham Reciprocity League was characteristic. It was under the leadership of Frederick Blood, a merchant of buttons, steel toys, jewelry, and watches, who did not object to having it known that he had become a protectionist only after his business began to suffer.[74] Blood, like Lister

[68] *Monetary Gazette,* Dec. 1 and 29, 1877; Jan. 26 and Feb. 23, 1878.
[69] *Ibid.,* Feb. 23, 1878. [70] *Ibid.*
[71] *Financial Reformer,* March 1 and May 1, 1879.
[72] Quoted in *ibid.,* June 1, 1879. [73] *Monetary Gazette,* March 1, 1879.
[74] *Fair Trade,* April 18, 1890, for biographical sketch. See also *British Empire,* July 12, 1879.

in Bradford, was interested primarily in converting the working classes and always claimed that the movement had "originated mainly among working men." [75] His League had two main objects. The first was to induce the Government to arrange with the colonies and dependencies "for the interchange of all English and colonial goods and commodities free of duty, or subject only to moderate duties for revenue purposes." The second was to impose against all foreign countries "import duties equal in amount to those they impose on English and colonial goods and productions." [76] The League worked hand-in-glove with David MacIver, who kept the question alive in the Parliament of 1874–80 and later helped form the Fair Trade League. Another collaborator was P. A. Muntz, who also sat in Parliament. Many meetings were held, and a "reciprocity" petition was once sent to Parliament, containing, it was claimed, 65,000 Birmingham signatures.[77]

FORMATION OF THE NATIONAL FAIR TRADE LEAGUE

The most conspicuous result of this protectionist ferment was the formation of the National Fair Trade League.[78] The League, more than any of the organizations with which we have dealt, was an expression of its times: times of depression, of imperialism, and of anxiety over the future of England. Because of this, and because it had the support of men of influence and wealth, it enjoyed a rather long life as the lives of such "agitating societies" go. Its roots struck deep. And from its foundation in 1881 to its demise in 1891, when its work was, in large measure, finished, it exercised no little influence over the shifting currents of opinion that the new age had released.

How did it start? Who were its founders? Consider first W. Farrer Ecroyd, head of the great firm of Wm. Ecroyd and Sons, worsted manufacturers of Burnley and Bradford. During the forties, Ecroyd had campaigned against the Corn Laws. Later, as other nations erected barriers against British goods, he became convinced that a free-trading England could not hold out alone. In 1874, when contesting Carlisle, and again in 1880, when standing against Hart-

[75] *Monetary Gazette,* March 1, 1879. [76] *Ibid.,* March 1, 1879.

[77] *Fair Trade,* April 18, 1890; *British Empire,* July 12, 1879.

[78] See the excellent short essay by Sydney Henry Zebel, *Fair Trade; an English Reaction to the Breakdown of the Cobden Treaty System.*

ington in North East Lancashire, he frankly advocated tariffs. He was unsuccessful both times. Finally, at a by-election in Preston in 1881, a thumping majority put him before Parliament and the country as the spokesman for the protectionist cause. Two years earlier Ecroyd had published *The Policy of Self-Help,* which appeared in several editions and became the bible of Fair Traders. The book outlined the failure of Cobden's prophecy that tariffs would disappear the world over, and argued that the only hope lay in welding the mother country and dependencies into "one great free trade Empire, capable . . . of supplying all its own essential wants." An imperial tariff would enclose resources and power sufficient to ensure that living standards would not fall: "A free trade Empire of 300 millions of people, embracing every variety of soil and climate, and strong to maintain the freedom of the seas, would be no mean world in itself."

Ecroyd's book supplied a program that ultimately proved to be the only one upon which those who were dissatisfied with free trade could unite. This was no small task. For between manufacturers who feared French woolens and farmers who feared American wheat, between workers who feared foreign sweat-shops and refiners who feared foreign subsidies, there were many and important differences. Some wanted reciprocity to force down foreign tariffs; some wanted protection; while none cared very much about the other fellow. They did not coöperate easily. There was considerable truth in the observation once made by an old free trader: "The strength of our position is this, that every free trader is the ally of every other free trader, whereas every protectionist looks with jealousy on those who wish to protect articles in regard to which he is a consumer, and not a producer." [79]

Another to whom Fair Trade owed much was S. Cunliffe Lister (later Lord Masham), inventor, silk manufacturer, and proprietor of the famous Manningham Mills at Bradford. The silk industry has been disastrously affected by imports from France following the Cobden treaty of 1860, and while prices fell, Lister was plagued by workmen whose wages and employment were in turn

[79] Lord Derby, quoted in *Times,* Dec. 2, 1887. Concerning Ecroyd, see: *Fair Trade,* Feb. 28, 1890; Bradford *Observer,* May 23, 1881; Preston *Herald,* May 14, 1881; Preston *Guardian,* June 4, 1881; Ecroyd, *A Speech;* Ecroyd, *Fair Trade.*

affected. "No strike committee, no master, not Lister and Co., but the foreigner at Créfeld and Lyons," he told them, "fixes the rate of wages to be paid at Manningham Mills. What he pays, Lister and Co. must pay, as long as his goods come into England free." [80] Lister, always concerned primarily with these proximate questions of wages and prices, did not care overmuch for imperial preference or protection to farmers; but for the sake of a common front against free trade, he became an imperialist and worked for agricultural as well as industrial protection.[81]

To Lister and Ecroyd it is necessary to add Sampson Samuel Lloyd, well-known manufacturer of Birmingham and chairman of the Board of Directors of Lloyd's Banking Company, Ltd. A typical late-Victorian man of affairs, Lloyd had founded the Chamber of Commerce of Birmingham, and later the Associated Chamber of Commerce, which he served as president from 1862 to 1880. He was a member of the Birmingham School Board, magistrate for the county Warwick, and a successful Parliamentary candidate twice in five attempts.[82] After Ecroyd, he was the most cogent of Fair Trade writers, and in 1885 completed the first English translation of Friedrich List's great protectionist apology, *The National System of Political Economy.*

A fourth member of the Fair Trade group was David MacIver, shipowner, formerly of the Cunard line. He was magistrate and alderman of Liverpool, chairman of the Liverpool Steamship Owners Association, director of the Great Western Railway, and Conservative M.P.[83] The others were Edward Charles Healey, founder and proprietor of the *Engineer;* [84] Thomas Wright Fenton of the Dewsbury Chamber of Commerce; [85] and James Treeve Edgecome, a journalist who edited various Fair Trade publications and probably wrote more on the subject than any man of his time.[86]

[80] S. C. Lister, *Free Trade in Corn.*

[81] *Ibid.;* Bradford *Observer,* Oct. 5 and 6, 1881; *British Empire,* Feb. 21, 1880; for more about Lister, see the *Dictionary of National Biography.*

[82] Frederic Boase, *Modern English Biography,* Vol. VI; *Men of the West; Fair Trade,* Oct. 11, 1889; S. S. Lloyd, *The Fair Trade Policy.*

[83] *Fair Trade,* Oct. 25, 1889. [84] *Ibid.,* Nov. 15, 1889. [85] *Ibid,* Nov. 21, 1890.

[86] Edgecome was editor of *Fair Trade,* although he hid the fact as well as he could. He signed certain correspondence as editor, May 10, 1889. Again, on March 15, 1889, it was announced that the editor would state the Fair Trade case at the National Liberal Club; and two weeks later, it was reported that the speaker had

It is somewhat exasperating that the story of Fair Trade must begin with Edgecome, the journalist, about whom we know least of all. Much of his history is hidden by the convention of editorial anonymity. It appears, however, that in November, 1877, he was editor of the *Monetary Gazette,* a staunch free-trade paper which at that time underwent a memorable conversion to the protectionist cause. Since 1874 the *Gazette* had preached the Cobdenite gospel without fail: free trade was white, protection black; and whenever "Reciprocitarians" were suspected to lurk near by, the *Gazette* was quick to raise the hue and cry.[87] Even the *Financial Reformer,* that oracle of free traders, commended its "excellent contemporary" as a "journal which is not afraid to proclaim the truth from the housetops." [88]

When Lord Bateman's protectionist letter appeared in the *Times* in November, 1877, the *Gazette* could scarcely master its wrath. Then suddenly, in almost a shorter time than it took to say "Queen Victoria," free trade flew out and protection in: Lord Bateman's heretical statements had become a "plain and outspoken letter"; [89] an article on the "Results of Free Trade" showed how foreign competition had paralyzed England's industry; [90] and a leading article demanded "a total revision of our commercial policy." [91] At the same time, advertisements of Lord Bateman's new Conservative Protectionist Association began to appear, and all those interested were invited to communicate with the editor.[92] What part Edgecome played in these proceedings cannot be fully known. We do not know whether he was editor before the changes took place, or whether he arrived just in time to supervise the alterations. We can be reasonably sure of only one thing, in fact: he was editor in November, 1877, when the paper set out on its new course, and he continued in that capacity for some time thereafter.[93]

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been Edgecome. Lord Dunraven once claimed that he himself was editor; but if he was, it was for a short time only.

[87] See almost any number before Nov., 1877.

[88] *Financial Reformer,* April 1 and Oct. 1, 1877.

[89] *Monetary Gazette,* Dec. 1, 1877.

[90] *Ibid.,* Nov. 24, 1877.

[91] *Ibid.,* Dec. 1, 1877.

[92] *Ibid.,* Dec. 1, 1877.

[93] I say "reasonably sure," because the evidence is just short of conclusive. The statement rests on the following: 1) Ten years later, Edgecome said he "first put pen to paper" on the subject of tariffs in Nov., 1877—*Fair Trade,* Nov. 11, 1887. 2) This was the very time that the *Monetary Gazette* took up protection. 3) Edgecome was, as we shall see, editor of the *British Empire,* after that paper was incorporated with

The *Gazette,* despite its new clothes and important friends, was not prosperous. Publication was suspended in March, 1878, resumed later in the year, then finally abandoned. Edgecome records that he had spent his savings and was greatly discouraged.[94]

At this time a letter reached him from S. Cunliffe Lister of Bradford. Lister expressed approval of Edgecome's struggle in behalf of British industry; he said that he was an old man, but that he was prepared to spend the rest of his life and £5,000 to further the cause.[95] The result was a new weekly called the *British Empire,* "A National Newspaper with which is incorporated the *Monetary Gazette.*" [96] Among the directors were Lister, Edgecome, and J. M. Hyde, of the old Reciprocity Free Trade Society.[97] The paper appeared weekly between May 3, 1879, and May 29, 1880, when it came to grief on charges of libeling Charles Bradlaugh, the atheist.

One of the first tasks to which the *British Empire* turned was that of organizing the "various scattered forces" opposed to free trade. "The moment for unity and action on this question was never more auspicious than at present," said a leading article on July 12, 1879. At about this same time, in fact, the forces were actually organizing; in the summer of 1879 the first two meetings of the Fair Trade group were held at the Westminster Palace Hotel in London, under the leadership of Ecroyd.[98] The discussions were tentative, but two decisions were reached: first, that if protection was to be restored in England, it would have to be protection "all around," that is for industry and agriculture alike; second, that the group should act as a committee "to define, consolidate, and disclose the principles" upon which protectionists could most advantageously "take their stand at the forthcoming election." [99] Tac-

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the *Gazette.* 4) Edgecome records that he had spent his savings in the struggle against free trade, and that the future looked black: the date at which his fortunes were, on his own statement, at such low ebb, corresponds precisely with the date on which the *Monetary Gazette* had to suspend publication. Most of this will emerge as the story proceeds.

[94] *Fair Trade,* Nov. 11, 1887.

[95] *Ibid.,* Nov. 4, 1887. Again, Edgecome: "in 1879, when the movement seemed to be dying, our Chairman [Lister] came forward with 5,000 pounds, and so put renewed life into our work." *Ibid.,* Nov. 11, 1887.

[96] *British Empire,* May 3, 1879.

[97] *Ibid.,* Sept. 27, 1879.

[98] *Fair Trade,* Special Extra Number, Dec. 31, 1887. See also the speech by Lloyd, reported in *Morning Post,* Dec. 12, 1881.

[99] *British Empire,* Aug. 23, 1879.

tical questions also were considered. There was some debate, for example, whether the call to arms should issue from London or the provinces. In general, opinion inclined toward the latter. As the *British Empire* pointed out on August 16, 1879, "the agitation must spring from those provincial districts where the producer's interest is more apparent, rather than from the metropolis, where consumers and distributors of the necessities of life rule paramount." This view was reiterated by the Bradford *Chronicle and Mail,* whose editor, W. H. Hatten, was close to the Ecroyd group: [100] "If there is one thing that seems more certain than another, it is that any attempt to operate upon the country from any London association must end in collapse. . . . The country must express its opinion to London before the force and the influence of London can react upon the provinces." [101]

These tactical considerations, perhaps, led Ecroyd to call the third meeting at Derby, November 20, 1879. Those attending were Ecroyd, Lister, Lloyd, MacIver, Fenton, and Healey. Ecroyd was chairman, Healey secretary. There was unanimous agreement on seven points: 1) That industrial raw materials should be admitted free from all quarters; 2) That a moderate duty, not exceeding 10 percent, should be placed on all food entering from foreign countries, while food from the Empire should be admitted free; 3) That all articles at present taxed for revenue, such as wine, spirits, and tobacco, should, when received from foreign countries, pay a differential duty of 10 percent over and above that levied on the same products shipped from the Empire; 4) That any Colony which persisted in maintaining a protective (not a revenue) tariff after these concessions had been made ought to be placed on the same footing as foreign nations; 5) That England should withdraw at once from the system of most-favored-nation commercial treaties in order to regain the power of bargaining for equal treatment; 6) That, in order to obtain equal treatment, England should place a duty of at least 10 percent on all foreign manufactured articles, giving notice that nations agreeing to admit English goods duty free would receive the same concession in return; and 7) That all articles in-

[100] *Fair Trade,* Oct. 10, 1890.

[101] Bradford *Chronicle and Mail,* Aug. 20, 1879, quoted in *British Empire,* Aug. 23, 1879.

tended for reëxport should be admitted under bond, duty free. Finally, the group agreed to solicit the aid of others "and so to secure a wider basis of support before proceeding to organize a public movement." [102]

Presented in this form in the election of 1880, the protectionist appeal fared rather poorly. MacIver, Lister, and Ecroyd—with Conservative backing—tried their luck in the constituencies, but only MacIver was returned. In Coventry, Leeds, Sheffield, Birmingham, and Southwark the question was discussed, but the *British Empire* complained on May 1, 1880, that "Candidates as a rule have ignored the question." Galt, on the other hand, wrote that with all the people he met the Liberal victory was regarded as an endorsement of free trade; and it was his opinion that "if things commercially go badly," the Conservatives would make reciprocity part of their program the next time they went to the country.[103]

Although most protectionists agreed that the moment was inopportune, Lister refused to be downhearted. With a characteristic gesture, he cheerfully took down his check book and offered £500 toward a sum of £5,000 "to be raised to establish an association that should fully ventilate and agitate the whole question." [104] He had to wait almost a year. Then, in February, 1881, with the French treaty coming up for renewal and Lancashire full of foreboding for the duties the French might put on, MacIver, sensing that the time to strike was at hand, called his friends to their fourth meeting. This time several newcomers were included. One was Henry Mitchell, partner of the A. and S. Henry Company of Bradford, industrial giant and former Mayor, popularly known as "King of Bradford." [105] Another was Frederick Young of the Royal Colonial Institute, son of the chairman of the Society for the Defense of British Industry which had fought the Anti-Corn Law League in the forties, and a well-known missionary of the new colonialism.[106] The third was R. A. MacFie, Scot sugar refiner, who was interested primarily in "countervailing duties" to offset the effects of foreign bounties and who later left the League because he could not endorse a tax on food.[107]

[102] See Ecroyd's report of the proceedings, *Foreign Times,* Dec. 20, 1879.
[103] Skelton, *Sir Alexander Galt,* pp. 533–34. [104] *British Empire,* May 8, 1880.
[105] *Fair Trade,* Jan. 31, 1890. [106] *Ibid.,* Feb. 14, 1890, and Nov. 15, 1889.
[107] *Ibid.,* Jan. 29, 1886.

Again the discussions were tentative. But it looked as if the French Government's intention to raise its tariff before renewing the treaty would soon bring the question of retaliation to a head. Protests were heard in every corner of the kingdom. The Associated Chambers of Commerce sent their president, C. J. Monk, to Paris to represent their interests to the British Commissioners.[108] The powerful Yorkshire Chamber appointed a special tariff committee to keep abreast of the negotiations, and sent a memorandum to Granville objecting to the proposed French increases.[109] Similar action was taken by some twenty-five other chambers, many trades' councils, and the Central Chamber of Agriculture.[110]

One must not infer from the strength of this protest against the French treaty that the protectionist movement had gained proportionately. Numerous interests which found offense in the French increases by no means adopted a protectionist view: what they protested against was a "retrograde treaty," one which should be less favorable to British products than the one already in operation. Gladstone, certainly no protectionist, reflected this feeling when he wrote Dilke that the choice, in his mind, "lay between no treaty, or no tariff treaty, and a treaty which as a whole should, in so far as it varies from the treaty of 1860, vary from it, as a whole, in the sense of improvement, of greater and not less favor to liberty of commerce." [111]

Yet glancing through the files of almost any English newspaper in the summer of 1881, one cannot escape the impression that the negotiations with France were of capital importance in the slow dissolution of mid-century Cobdenite commercial liberalism. Take the *Times,* for example. On March 17 a leading article cautioned the French against acting upon a protectionist "delusion which will be speedily shattered by painful experience. For ourselves, we can well afford to wait. The abnegation of the commercial treaty of 1860 . . . would be far more injurious to France than to England." But two months later the *Times* itself was flirting with these delusions: "It would be a serious matter, from the French point of view, to offend England and leave us at liberty, however un-

[108] Bradford *Observer,* April 28, 1881. [109] *Ibid.,* May 17 and 28, 1881.
[110] *Parliamentary Papers,* [c. 3014] and [c. 3051].
[111] Gladstone MSS, July 28, 1881.

likely we are to use that liberty, to prohibit the export of coal and levy high duties on French wines, silks, and other articles." [112] Or again, take the *Pall Mall Gazette,* heretofore no less ardent than the *Times* in the defense of free-trade principles:

> It would be the easiest thing possible for this country, were it in the humour, to cripple French trade to an incalculable extent. . . . We should be extremely sorry to see any such course pursued; for . . . the population of France at least might suffer grievous miseries before it became convinced of its folly. But the possibility has to be looked at.[113]

Even the *Economist* admitted that the new French duties would cause hardships, but went on to maintain that to break off negotiations as the others had suggested would be to forego a partial good because a whole good was unattainable.[114] Nevertheless, the *Economist* opened its correspondence columns to many protests against a retrograde treaty: one of these advocated a complete suspension of trade to bring France to her knees and ultimately to her senses.[115]

The climax came in May, 1881, when Ecroyd was returned in a by-election at Preston. The vote was a clear endorsement of the protectionist views which he brought boldly to the fore in his speeches. On election day, free traders distributed handbills showing "in a plain and homely way" what his proposals would mean; [116] these were the familiar signs of the forties: "Vote for Thompson and Cheap Bread!"; "Vote for the Cheap Loaf." [117] But all in vain. Ecroyd's majority was more than 1,600 votes, five times greater than his predecessor's. Did this mean, as the *Saturday Review* suggested, that the workmen of industrial towns were becoming interested in protection? Coming at the same time as the protests against the French treaty, it was something at least to consider. Galt wrote Tilley that many Conservative leaders were convinced on the basis of Ecroyd's showing that their best hope lay in adopting protection: "and I think they will ultimately, and indeed soon, take this line." [118]

[112] *Times,* May 30, 1881.
[113] *Pall Mall Gazette,* May 10, 1881.
[114] *Economist,* April 23 and May 7, 1881.
[115] *Ibid.,* July 9, 1881.
[116] Bradford *Observer,* May 17, 1881.
[117] *Ibid.,* May 17, 1881; *Morning Post,* May 21, 1881.
[118] Skelton, *Sir Alexander Galt,* p. 534. For Ecroyd's election see Preston *Guardian,* May 14, 1881; Preston *Herald,* May 14 and May 18, 1881; *Daily News,* May 20, 1881; *Pall Mall Gazette,* May 18, 1881. *Saturday Review,* quoted in Preston *Guardian,* June 4, 1881.

"No one," said a speaker at the annual Cobden Club meeting in July, 1881, "can watch the movements of public opinion without seeing that at the present moment there is an attempt, under the name of 'reciprocity,' to get back protective duties; and unless we are careful we may find that the treaty negotiations with France may have the effect of encouraging the cry for protective duties in this country." And the chairman warned: "If the battle of Free Trade is to be fought over again the Cobden Club is perfectly well prepared for the struggle." [119]

If the champion was prepared, so was the challenger. Ecroyd was returned on the 20th of May. On the 31st, his friends, joined by W. J. Harris, representing the agricultural interest, and Sir Alexander Galt, the Canadian High Commissioner, met at the Westminster Palace. They resolved to found a society to educate the country in the evils of free trade; to spread "information as to the resources of a United Empire"; and to petition the House of Commons against renewal of the French treaty.[120] When these resolutions had been carried, Lloyd, the chairman, asked what the name of the society should be, adding, in an aside to Edgecome, "It will be worth £100 if any one will suggest a good name." After several suggestions had failed to enlist general support, Healey passed a slip of paper to MacIver with the words "Fair Trade League" written upon it. MacIver added the word "National," and the title, submitted in that form, met general approval.[121]

When the discussion turned to the need for an expense fund, "the sum of about 800 pounds was subscribed at the table . . . and placed in the hands of Mr. Charles Healey, the first treasurer of the League." [122] MacIver made the first contribution, a check for £100.[123]

The new League made two important decisions. The task of drawing a program was assigned to a small committee; and it was agreed that pending completion of their work, a campaign should be launched, under the name of the "Anglo-French Treaty Committee," [124] against renewal of the French treaty. The Committee sat "for some weeks at the Westminster Palace Hotel"; but about its activity very little can be known.

[119] *Morning Post,* July 23, 1881.
[120] National Fair Trade League, *Manifesto.*
[121] *Fair Trade,* Nov. 15, 1889.
[122] *Ibid.,* Dec. 31, 1887.
[123] *Ibid.,* Oct. 25, 1889.
[124] *Ibid.,* Dec. 31, 1887.

A short time later the League established a central office at 23, Cockspur Street.[125] By August 2, 1881, the program was completed and issued in the form of a *Manifesto* of the National Fair Trade League. The *Manifesto* set forth the conviction of the League's founders that "the refusal of foreign nations to receive British manufactures in exchange for our purchases from them is working most injuriously to the welfare and prosperity of the nation, and endangering the steady employment, fair wages, and future well-being of our working classes." It announced the intention of the League "to promote, by every means at its command, an extension of trade with all countries, and especially with our colonies and dependencies . . . and to agitate for such fiscal re-adjustments as shall prevent the products of foreign states which refuse to deal with Great Britain in fair trade from unduly competing with the products of home labor." [126]

The electorate was invited to support four specific demands: 1) That no commercial treaties be signed unless terminable on one year's notice; 2) That raw materials for manufactures be admitted free from every quarter; 3) That "adequate duties" be placed on the manufactures of foreign states, with the understanding that any concessions which these states granted would be reciprocated; 4) That a "moderate duty" be placed on all foreign food, but no duty on food from the Empire. Unlike the manufacturing duties, these duties on food were to be more or less permanent, and not to be lowered in reciprocation to foreign states. For England must keep faith with imperial farmers who invested in new lands "in reliance upon the stability of our policy." [127]

In the daily press it was announced that a fund of £50,000 would be raised at the rate of £10,000 a year. Among the larger sums already subscribed were £2,000 from Lister; £1,000 from Healey; £500 from MacIver; and £500 from Lloyd.[128]

[125] *Ibid.*, Dec. 31, 1887. [126] *Times,* Aug. 3, 1881.

[127] *Manifesto.* The *Manifesto* was signed by Lloyd, the first President of the League, and Harold Gore-Brown, Secretary. The Executive Committee included Lloyd; Henry Hawkes of Birmingham; John Henderson, Director of the City Bank of Oxford; J. M. Hyde of the old Reciprocity Free Trade Society; Lister; Mitchell; Edward Montague Nelson of London and Warwick; Arthur Pryor, of Truman, Hanbury, and Co., Spitalfields; and Frederick Young.

[128] *Times,* Aug. 3, 1881; *Daily Telegraph,* Aug. 4, 1881; Bradford *Observer,* Aug. 2, 1881.

The reception accorded by the metropolitan press was sharply divided. The most extravagant praise was found, naturally, in the *Morning Post.* The *St. James's Gazette* and the *Globe* were not unfavorable; [129] the *Daily Telegraph,* while disclaiming protection, at least welcomed the League as a sign of the times which improved England's bargaining position in the negotiations with France.[130] The *Daily Chronicle,* on the other hand, described the League as an "invidious influence which is undermining the economic policy of the country. . . . They use spurious arguments, and we cannot deny that they have made converts. But the evil caused by this resuscitation of protection under an attractive and delusive *alias* must be nipped in the bud." [131] The *Pall Mall Gazette* called the League a sorry collection of "Tory lords, Tory M.P.'s, and starved-out traders"; [132] the *Times* and the Conservative *Standard* took much the same line.[133] The League itself, recognizing the power of the press, caused large advertisements to be inserted on the front pages of the *Times, Morning Post,* and other papers from August 11 onwards.

The Englishman who read his daily paper thus knew a great deal about the Fair Trade League; and when he read the list of subscribers he must have felt that the League was to have a very long innings. Someone in Bradford took one look at the list and observed cynically that the goal of £50,000 ought to be reached without greatly inconveniencing anybody.[134]

[129] *Quarterly Review,* Oct., 1881, p. 553.
[130] *Daily Telegraph,* Aug. 4, 1881.
[131] *Daily Chronicle,* Aug. 11, 1881.
[132] *Pall Mall Gazette,* Aug. 5, 1881.
[133] Standard, Sept. 6, 1881.
[134] Bradford *Observer,* Aug. 2, 1881.

II

TARIFF REFORM, LABOR, AND THE ANTI-BOUNTY MOVEMENT 1881-1895

HAVING GATHERED funds and trumpeted the new program in the press, the Fair Trade League hastily set out to conquer the kingdom. After a month or so of spirited activity, however, most protectionists were prepared to admit that the kingdom could be, at times, uncommonly stubborn. Branches formed at Sheffield, Liverpool, and Coventry were for a long while of purely local significance. Attempts to wrest support from the Farmers' Alliance, the Trades' Union Congress, the Associated Chambers of Commerce, the British Association, and Parliament itself failed miserably. Some protectionists were not above adopting the most questionable means of advancing their cause, even to the extent of purchasing followers who could not be persuaded. As a result, in their relations with organized labor, Fair Traders were not only defeated and dismissed; they were dishonored as well. Of all the fates that could befall an "agitation" in Victorian England, none was more likely to be fatal.

FAIR TRADE AND THE WORKERS

To men like Ecroyd and Lister, the "labor problem" was very real. As prices fell, costs, as anyone could see, had to be reduced, and labor costs were no exception. In the first edition of the *Policy of Self-Help,* Ecroyd wrote that foreign manufacturers enjoyed not only the advantage of protective tariffs, but also that of cheaper labor. To restore equal competition, England had to face both sides of the problem: retaliate with tariffs and extend the working week to sixty hours. The latter proposal was conspicuously absent in later editions, but Ecroyd did not put it altogether out of his mind. Lister,

who seldom compromised, refused to concede an inch of ground. When criticized for his labor views, he always replied that the foreigner alone was responsible. "If you don't believe it," he told his workmen, "go to Créfeld and Lyons and ascertain the hours they work and the wages they receive. It is the foreign blacklegs, and not the home, you have to face; and neither master nor men can escape from this as long as we have free imports." [1]

The workmen, however, were suspicious. Henry Broadhurst and the Liberal leaders of the Trades' Union Congress told them that tariffs meant a rise in the price of bread. Socialists warned against the arguments of men who could spend £50,000 for a Fair Trade agitation and who yet claimed that wages must be reduced. H. H. Champion, the Socialist leader, once admitted that workers could not hope for an eight-hour day "without conceding the *principle* of Fair Trade"; but he wanted proof that Fair Traders were genuinely interested in improving labor conditions. He suggested that they first

> go to the root of the matter, and reduce the hours of labor all around. . . . If you will do that, and can thus persuade the workman that your real object is to improve *his* condition, and not to save the landlord's rent, the mine-owner's royalty, and the capitalist's interest, you will infallibly sweep the constituencies.[2]

To the workers of Bradford this sounded like good sense. The next time Lister referred them to foreign blacklegs, he found that "owing to the organized opposition of a body of Manningham Mill strike hands, very little was heard beyond the reporters' gallery." [3]

Some Fair Traders were inclined to let money do most of the talking. In the world of labor, where a wilderness of credulity and corruption had still, in the eighties, to be reclaimed, there were spellbinders who sometimes put honorariums before honor. In Birmingham, for example, a certain J. W. Mahoney organized workers' protectionist meetings in return for financial assistance from Frederick Blood and William Priest, of the Fair Trade League. Mahoney, a former temperance worker and actor, claimed to be the only living "artiste" who had performed Hamlet and Othello in monologue alone and unassisted. His description of his

[1] S. C. Lister, *Free Trade in Corn.* [2] *Fair Trade,* March 2, 1888.
[3] S. C. Lister, *Fair Trade versus Free Trade.* London, 1892.

relations with his Fair Trade friends was characteristic: "Mr. Blood was extremely generous in the opening of the campaign, and Mr. Priest has in accordance with his highly philosophical principles assisted in the most permanently judicious manner." [4]

But Mahoney was a lamb alongside the principal agents of the Fair Trade League among the workers.

The first of these, one Thomas Kelly, had been expelled from the Bristol Trades' Council because it had been "clearly proved by documentary evidence, that he was a defaulter by not accounting for monies received by him, but misappropriating the same to purposes other than the legitimate purposes of the Society." [5] When Kelley formed a so-called National Conciliation League, the Bristol Council resolved "that this League is a fraud" and warned "all Trades Movements to have nothing to do with it." [6]

Kelly's chief collaborator was Samuel Peters, an erratic fellow who in 1879 submitted the following resolution to the Bristol Council: "That no institution has done more to alienate the affection that ought to exist between employers and their employees than Trade Unions." When he declined to proceed and "alleged that as he had made the statement it was now for the council to disprove it," the subject was dropped and a vote of censure passed.[7] Two years later, Peters and Kelly were condemned for falsely representing themselves as "delegates from the Bristol Trades' Council for the purpose of attacking and damaging the character of Mr. G. Howell, the Labour candidate for Stafford." [8] In 1885, when in the name of London Trade Unionists they campaigned against Henry Broadhurst, the London Council, disclaiming all responsibility for their "contemptible subterfuges of calumny," resolved that "the attempt to foist upon the people of Birmingham the impression that such slanders are the sentiments of the London Trade Unionists is a vile mendacity." [9]

So much for Peters and Kelly. They were assisted by Patrick Kenny, who had been expelled from the London Trades' Council for "vindictive and unfounded statements" against the secretary and for conduct which was "a disgrace to the principles of trade

[4] *Fair Trade*, Jan. 9, 1891.
[5] Webb MSS, A–III–5–258.
[6] *Ibid.*, A–III–5–258.
[7] *Ibid.*, A–III–5–264.
[8] *Ibid.*, A–III–5–268.
[9] London Trades' Council MSS, Nov. 16, 1885.

unionism." [10] Later, when he wrote a "lying and scurrilous" attack against the secretary, the Council resolved to consult a solicitor "with a view to a criminal prosecution of him for malicious and unjust libel." [11] When he published a "defamatory libel" against George Howell, who was standing for Parliament in 1885, the Council protested unanimously against "the systematic and nefarious efforts of certain London demagogues to disparage every prominent workman in public estimation at the moment when it was likely such persons could be in any way useful to the cause of labor." [12]

When and how relations between these men and Fair Traders began, it is impossible to say. During 1879 Edgecome's *Monetary Gazette* singled them out for frequent and favorable comment and published a series of letters in which Peters urged protective duties.[13] In April, 1879, Sampson Lloyd addressed one of their meetings; [14] in May, 1881, Henry Hawkes addressed another; [15] in August, 1881, Ecroyd attended a third.[16] By this time relations were close, and large plans were afoot.

What emerged was a daring scheme calculated to give the impression that British labor was in a Fair Trade mood. The plan was to be accomplished in two steps. First, a conference of protectionist workmen was to be summoned to meet in London on September 8 and 9 to pass resolutions endorsing the Fair Trade program. Secondly, the delegates were to remain in London long enough to attend the official Trades' Union Congress, scheduled to convene on September 10; here they would introduce Fair Trade resolutions, and, if they could not command a majority, at least create the impression that a strong minority was in revolt.

Fair Traders chose not to associate the Fair Trade League with the scheme, but formed, instead, another organization, the National League "for the preservation of our home industries and the protection of our national labor against unfair competition." The League represented an alliance—one is tempted to say unholy alliance—between workmen and various "gentlemen of quality." On the workers' side, in addition to Peters and Kelly (their

[10] London Trades' Council MSS, Nov. 7, 1878.
[11] *Ibid.*, March 9, 1880.
[12] *Ibid.*, Dec. 3, 1885.
[13] *Monetary Gazette*, Feb. 8, April 12 and 19, 1879, for example.
[14] *Ibid.*, April 12, 1879.
[15] Birmingham *Daily Post*, May 11, 1881.
[16] *Daily Telegraph*, Aug. 10, 1881.

friend Kenny did not appear until later), the most important were R. Hunt, S. W. Maddocks, William Lind, and F. Wigniton. Some were from provincial trades' councils; most appear to have been recruited among the shipwrights, sugar operatives, and dock hands of the East End, where distress was admittedly widespread. The "quality" included S. S. Lloyd, W. J. Harris, Sir Algernon Borthwick, editor of the *Morning Post,* Sir John Eardley-Wilmot, the Duke of Rutland, Sir Henry Hoare, Captain R. H. Armit, and Sir Nevile Lubbock.[17] Lubbock is a name to watch; he was chairman of the powerful West India Committee which wanted "countervailing duties" against foreign sugar bounties, and he had dealings with workingmen which we shall have occasion to note later.

The affinity between the National League and the Fair Trade League is obvious at first glance. In the first place, the two programs were, in every respect, identical.[18] In the second place, at least five men were at one and the same time prominently associated with both organizations, and Ecroyd, though apparently not a member, attended National League meetings.[19] In the third place, the workmen who attended the National League Conference were entertained at luncheon by the Fair Trade Council. Finally, the National League, in its propaganda, frequently employed the term "Fair Trade policy" to describe its aim. To contemporaries, the liaison seemed so obvious that in many press accounts, notably those of the *Morning Post,* whose editor was on the Council of the National League, the names of the two organizations were used interchangeably. Yet some pains were taken to deny the connection, and many names associated with the Fair Trade movement in almost all its phases were, in accounts of this ill-fated venture, conspicuously absent: Frederick Young and Edward Healey, for example. Amalgamation of the two leagues was discussed; Borth-

[17] *Morning Post,* July 19 and Sept. 12, 1881, and Aug. 4, 1881; *Daily Telegraph,* Aug. 10, 1881; *Times,* Sept. 19, 1881. W. J. Harris was Director of the London Docks; as such, he perhaps had something to do with the interest which the dock hands took in Fair Trade.

[18] The National League soon announced that "the program includes confederation between the mother country and the colonies and dependencies, with representatives in Parliament of the latter, the whole having Free Trade for themselves, but uniting to fight other nations with their own weapons." *Morning Post,* Aug. 20, 1881. The League sometimes advertised itself as the "National League for the Unification and Consolidation of the Empire." *Ibid.,* Sept. 9, 1881.

[19] *Daily Telegraph,* Aug. 10, 1881; Manchester *Guardian,* Aug. 10, 1881.

wick's *Morning Post* urged it; [20] and one of the workingmen said they were "quite willing to amalgamate, . . . but must insist on having workingmen delegates sitting on the council." [21] Here, seemingly, was the stumbling block: the more conservative Fair Traders refused to admit workingmen to the League council, and the "shadow" league had to be formed as a consequence.

Meanwhile, plans were maturing for the "monster meeting" of protectionist workmen to be held on September 8 and 9. How much money was spent will probably never be known, but undoubtedly money was spent. The Parliamentary Committee of the Trades' Union Congress claimed to know that at least one protectionist workman "had been traveling the country offering to pay the expenses of leading trade unionists to the Fair Trade Conference." [22] In Leeds a member of the Trades' Council "read a considerable correspondence he had had with the organizers of the Fair Trade Conference, whose offers he had constantly refused, as he was entirely opposed to the movement." [23] And in the end, as we shall see, a few guilty ones made a clean breast of the whole affair.

Fair Traders took pains, of course, not to expose themselves recklessly. Their invitations, signed by R. Hunt, "workingmen's secretary," merely announced that the purpose of the conference was "to take into consideration the present condition of British Industry," and after urging the recipient to attend, asked him to state *"what amount you will require in addition to railway expenses. Most of the delegates are charging 15s. per day, but you need not be guided by them."* [24] Altogether, about fifty men were found willing to accept this proposition. Raising funds to send delegates to annual congresses was, in many trades' councils, no small problem. This year some of the men who had accepted Fair Trade money volunteered in their local organizations to make the journey to London at what they claimed was their own expense. The unions, desiring to conserve their resources, chose these men as delegates, and thus unwittingly prepared the way for protectionist representation at the Trades' Union Congress.

[20] *Morning Post,* Sept. 12, 1881.
[21] *Ibid.,* Sept. 10, 1881.
[22] Bradford *Observer,* Oct. 15, 1881.
[23] *Labour Standard,* Oct. 22, 1881.
[24] Italics mine. Bradford *Observer,* Sept. 28, 1881; *Times,* Sept. 29, 1881.

The Fair Trade meetings on September 8 and 9 were without incident. The stock resolutions were faithfully adopted, and in the speeches there was a studied attempt to convey the impression of solidarity between capital and labor in a crusade against a system of free imports working obvious hardship on both.[25]

The fun began at the Trades' Union Congress, which convened the following day.[26] News had somehow leaked out that Fair Traders intended to pack the meetings. To forestall them, it was moved that "no one shall be eligible as a delegate to the Congress whose expenses are paid by private individuals, or any other institution not a bona-fide trade union or trades council"; and the mover added darkly that "There were persons present . . . who would not be entitled to sit . . . if this resolution was adopted." One speaker charged that many delegates "professedly representing trade societies were not the delegates of those societies. Their railway fares were paid, they were paid 15s. per day, and had luncheon at the Westminster Palace Hotel, out of the funds of the Fair Trade Association." When the matter was referred to committee, several of those under suspicion made full confessions, and Peters, Moore, Maddocks, Harlowe, Lind, and Tindall were expelled.

The purge did not settle the affair, however. On the following day Peters and Lind forced an entry into the hall; when a member was dispatched to summon the police, word came back that "Capt. Bedford Pim is outside, and he says that he is a magistrate and will not allow a constable to be sent for. On receiving instructions to do so I will put my hand on Capt. Bedford Pim and ask him to leave the building. . . . He has advised these men to disturb this meeting." Another member reported that the constable and sergeant at the nearest corner refused to help unless the Congress intended to bring charges against someone: "Whether there has been any pressure brought to bear upon the police before, I can not say." At length, the meeting adjourned, while a deputation called upon a friendly magistrate, who said they had every right

[25] Bradford *Observer,* Sept. 9, 10, and 12, 1881; Manchester *Examiner and Times,* Sept. 12, 1881; *Daily Telegraph,* Sept. 9, 10, and 12, 1881.

[26] The proceedings were noted in many daily papers, but the report in the Bradford *Observer* of Sept. 17, 1881, seems to be most complete. See also W. J. Davis, *The British Trades' Union Congress,* I, 86; and Sidney and Beatrice Webb, *History of Trade Unionism,* pp. 394–95 and note. Also *Labour Standard,* Oct. 15, 1881, and *Fair Trade,* "Report of Year's Progress," Dec. 28, 1888, p. 180 note.

to eject undesirable persons by force. On reassembling, the Congress found that Peters had left, but Lind, who remained, had to be escorted from the building by the doorkeeper.

Naturally, these events brought severe criticism on the heads of Fair Traders. "If a number of persons with the requisite amount of spare cash choose to spend it in subsidizing [the Fair Trade movement]," wrote the *Daily News*, ". . . that is their affair. . . . But it is time to have done with the pretense that they are making unpaid converts among the workingmen." [27] The *Daily Chronicle* characterized the attempt as "far worthier of the 'baser sort' of Irish agitation than of law-abiding Englishmen." [28] Alone of the great metropolitan papers, Borthwick's *Morning Post* came to the defense.[29] The National League, the Fair Trade shadow organization, was unable to recover from the blow. The Duke of Rutland was optimistic enough to subscribe £100 to the League's fund in October,[30] and there was some talk of convening another national convention of protectionist workers; [31] but the League was nevertheless finished. Before the close of 1881, it had quite disappeared from view.

Meanwhile, workers who had accepted the Fair Trade offers faced a measure of justice in their trades' councils. In Birmingham, when Harlowe and Maddocks admitted they had been paid to attend the Congress "to promote the Fair Trade movement," the Council censured them for "withholding . . . when offering to attend the Trades' Union Congress at their own expense, the important fact that they were already engaged to attend the Congress as the paid agents of a political organization." [32] A resolution was then passed "affirming that Free Trade has been and is beneficial to this country; and that any proposal to put import duties on food of any kind is so absurd as to be altogether outside discussion." [33] The Trades' Councils of Bristol, Sheffield, and Leeds took similar action.[34] The matter was not finally settled until the

[27] *Daily News*, Sept. 15, 1881. [28] *Daily Chronicle*, Sept. 17, 1881.
[29] *Morning Post*, Sept. 16, 17, 21, and 26, 1881.
[30] Bradford *Observer*, Oct. 4, 1881. [31] *Standard*, Sept. 21, 1881.
[32] MSS Minute Book of Birmingham Trades' Council, Sept. 24, 1881, quoted in Webb MSS, A–III–4–204–5.
[33] *Ibid.*, A–III–4–206.
[34] MSS Minute Book of Bristol Trades' Council, quoted in *ibid.*, A–III–5–268; *Labour Standard*, Oct. 22, 1881.

following year. It was said that Peters, Kelly, Kenny, and Pim "swore vengeance [on Broadhurst] and openly declared that the 'Fair Traders' would harass and worry the life out of him." They kept up "a most unjust, vindictive, and malicious" attack which the Congress of 1882 described as "an attempt at moral assassination." [35] The Congress, in a unanimous resolution, reaffirmed its confidence in Broadhurst, and thereby put the matter officially at an end.[36]

Kelly and Peters, however, were not yet ready to bow off the stage. After running afoul of the Trades' Union Congress, they busied themselves agitating among the disinherited of London's East End, where unemployment was mounting in trades dependent upon sugar and shipping. Their friend Wigniton was president of the Watermen and Lightermen of the River Thames; Lind was general-secretary of the Seamen's Amalgamated Protective Society; and Kenny himself was secretary of the Dock Porters and Sugar Warehousemen.[37] All these groups took part in the campaign against foreign bounties, often indistinguishable from the Fair Trade movement, and in the mid-eighties an organization known as the East End Fair Trade League emerged.[38]

Like most enterprises that Kelly and Peters touched, the East End Fair Trade League enjoyed a spectacularly brief career. Its downfall came early in 1886. In February, when London was full of cold and unemployment and the Lord Mayor was collecting a fund to relieve distress, Trafalgar Square was the scene of two disorderly meetings which fell, not by accident, it seems, on the same day. One was organized by John Burns and his Socialist friends; the other by Kelly, Peters, and Kenny. As the two groups strove for the attention of the crowd, the excitement became great. Burns charged that Kelly and Peters were "the paid agitators . . . of the Fair Trade League"; someone was thrown into the fountain; then a mob with joined hands surged over the Fair Trade platform, smashed it, and scattered the crowd into adjoining streets. In Pall Mall and Piccadilly, windows of fashionable clubs were smashed and many shops wrecked and sacked before reinforcements from Scotland Yard could clear the streets.[39] For several days the West

[35] Davis, *op. cit.*, I, 90; Webb, *op. cit.*, pp. 394–95n. [36] Davis, *op. cit.*, I, 93–94.
[37] *Morning Post*, July 19, 1881. [38] *Times*, Feb. 9, 1886. [39] *Ibid.*, Feb. 9, 1886.

End was on tenterhooks while crowds gathered in Trafalgar Square to hear speeches and read handbills, and the rumor spread that armies of unemployed were forming in the suburbs. The *Times,* recalling the Chartist demonstrations, said that in some respects the present disorders were even more grave.[40]

Now while there is no reason to believe that the Eminent Victorians of the Fair Trade League ordered windows to be broken in the Conservative Club, there can be no doubt that they used such agitations for all they were worth. The League admitted that "There was, of course, much Fair Trade Literature circulated in the crowds . . . as there always is on the occasion of people's demonstrations." [41] And *Fair Trade* expressed the hope that the riots would open Liberal eyes "to the fact that big as the loaf may be, it is not cheap when foreigners prevent Englishmen from earning the wages wherewith to buy it." [42]

Time and again the Trade Union movement was shocked by the deception and audacity of Peters and Kelly, supported by the Fair Trade League. In 1887 the Trades' Union Congress voted to "repudiate and denounce" them for falsely claiming that the Congress had endorsed one of their meetings.[43] Shortly after, Peters and Kelly led a large and disorderly procession from Whitechapel to Hyde Park, where, after provoking a near riot, they promised "to work for and vote for anybody, even the Devil himself, tails, horns, and hoofs all included, if his Satanic Majesty would only come out as a Fair Trader." [44] In the procession were banners, bands, and wagonettes, suggesting a degree of preparation and expense quite beyond the means of Peters and Kelly working unassisted. It was reported that despite the presence of numerous police, ruffians "did not scruple to rob anyone they could lay their hands on," and speeches "were now and then interrupted by the chase of a pickpocket." [45]

Another characteristic episode occurred later at a Liberal meeting, where Peters persisted in interrupting until given a hearing. When he rose to speak he was

[40] *Times,* Feb. 10 and 11, 1886.
[41] *Fair Trade,* Feb. 19, 1886.
[42] *Ibid.,* Feb. 26, 1886.
[43] *Times,* Sept. 9, 1887.
[44] *Ibid.,* Oct. 4, 1887; *Fair Trade,* Sept. 30, and Oct. 7, 1887.
[45] *Times,* Oct. 4, 1887.

met with a perfect storm of hissing, howling, and groaning, and cries of . . . "How do you get your living?" . . . He could get no further, for the storm was renewed until he left the platform, which he did very quickly. When he got down he showed signs of wanting to use a large stick he had, but an inspector of police put his hand on his shoulder and said: "If you do that, my boy, I shall run you in." Peters then subsided and with his friend Kelly and others left the precincts of the club.[46]

Meanwhile, Fair Trade—and particularly Fair Trade among the workers—had become intimately bound up with the campaign against sugar bounties, to which we must now turn.

THE ANTI-BOUNTY AGITATION: PLANTERS AND REFINERS

While Peters and Kelly were causing fur to fly in the world of labor, the sugar industry in England was undergoing what Sir Louis Mallet called a "progressive process of extinction."[47] A Select Committee on Sugar reporting in 1880 concluded that foreign bounties on the export of sugar were chiefly responsible and that these bounties had two main consequences: first, they had practically extinguished the loaf-sugar refining trade in Great Britain; and second, they had checked the development of the sugar-growing industry in the Colonies, principally the West Indian Colonies, whose future prosperity seemed greatly endangered. The Committee recommended an International Sugar Conference for the suppression of bounties, and urged that when most-favored-nation treaties were renewed, the Foreign Office should make certain that liberty to apply *countervailing duties* against bounty-fed sugar be expressly recognized. This phrase *countervailing duties* must be carefully noted: it became the rallying cry of the organized sugar industry in Great Britain and, by supplying a new leverage for those desiring to overturn the "dead weight of the Cobdenite tradition," played an important role in the Fair Trade movement.

When we speak of the "organized sugar industry" we mean, roughly, two groups: the sugar refiners of Great Britain and the sugar planters of the West Indian Colonies. Both had been seri-

[46] *Star* (London), May 6, 1889.

[47] The quotation and the material following it are taken from the Report of the Select Committee on the Sugar Industries, *Parliamentary Papers,* 1880 (332) xii. 519.

ously affected by the action of foreign bounties. In 1864, it was said, there had been about thirty loaf-sugar refineries in Great Britain; by 1875 the industry was practically extinct. The import of loaf sugar, meanwhile, had risen from 13,731 tons in 1863 to 157,807 tons in 1878. Sir Robert Giffen claimed that refiners had adequate compensation in the expansion of "moist sugar" refining, which was not adapted to continental conditions and remained therefore a practical monopoly of British refiners. To what extent this ameliorated the hardship of the loaf-sugar refiners as a group, it is difficult to say. The leaders of the anti-bounty campaign claimed to have suffered practically a dead loss, and the time and energy they gave to the campaign suggest that there was more than a little truth in their claim. But as for the refining of moist or "soft" sugar in general, there is no doubt that a great expansion was in progress: to meet the needs of the growing industry, the import of raw sugar rose from something just short of 400,000 tons in 1864 to about 700,000 tons in 1880. At this point the complaint of the West Indian planters was heard. For while Great Britain was almost doubling her total imports of raw sugar, the amount which she took from the West Indies remained virtually stationary: 186,264 tons in 1863, and 194,846 tons in 1878. The planters claimed that they were unable to share proportionately in the expansion, because they could not meet the competition of bounty-fed beetroot sugar imported from the continent, chiefly from Austria. Witnesses appearing before the Select Committee of 1880 agreed that the average sugar estate in the West Indies was operating at a loss; and all anticipated "a general abandonment of sugar cultivation should the present state of things continue." [48]

Both refiners and planters were organized for action. The Sugar Refiners' Committee, under George Martineau and James Duncan, had raised the cry against bounties as early as the 1850s, when the loaf sugar of France and Holland first made its appearance on a large scale in the British market. Refiners were later joined by colonial planters, who saw that " every ton of foreign refined sugar imported displaced an equivalent quantity of their raw sugar." [49] The planters worked through the West India Committee, com-

[48] The quotation and the material following it are taken from the Report of the Select Committee on the Sugar Industries, *Parliamentary Papers*, 1880 (332) xii. 519.

[49] James Martineau, *Sugar*, p. 120.

posed of "proprietors, merchants, bankers, and others connected with the British West Indies and British Guiana." [50] The Committee was a powerful organization boasting a long record of lobbying activity. During the eighties it maintained a permanent office and library in London, and used its funds and connections in a vigilant defense of the "proprietary interests in the British West Indian Colonies." [51]

The claim was frequently made, by planters and refiners alike, that their campaign for countervailing duties had nothing to do with Fair Trade. They argued that their object was to restore *real* free trade by "neutralizing" the effects of foreign bounties and thus creating conditions of equal competition. But to Englishmen accustomed to think of tariffs in the language of black and white, this distinction between protection and "neutralization" was dubious. After all, even Ecroyd refused to call himself a protectionist; what did it matter if the sugar interests refused to call themselves Fair Traders? Both wanted tariffs, and both had the acumen to see that if one wanted something in a Cobdenite world, one had to use Cobdenite language to get it.[52] Only George Martineau of the Refiners seems to have been genuinely troubled by the thought of a protective tariff. The others, in one degree or another, were willing to use or to abuse Fair Trade according as it served their ends. Nevile Lubbock, chairman of the West India Committee and real leader of the anti-bounty campaign, was on intimate terms with Fair Traders. He took part in the ill-famed National League of 1881, and in 1886, by signing the minority report of the Royal Commission on the Depression in Trade and Industry, embraced the Fair Trade program in every important particular.

The anti-bounty campaign assumed many forms. In the first place there were recurrent pocket-sized agitations, usually set off by the imposition of a new bounty abroad. For example, in 1884,

[50] *West Indian Circular*, No. 63, Feb. 16, 1891.

[51] West India MSS, March 1, 1888.

[52] This was the view taken by the permanent officials at the Board of Trade, with whom the sugar interests carried on an extensive and frequently bitter correspondence. As Sir Thomas Farrer wrote, the Board were "firmly convinced of the impolicy of prohibiting or restricting importation by protective or countervailing duties," and could not grant the validity of distinctions drawn by interested parties in an attempt to secure protection for their own products. Board of Trade MSS, Farrer to the Foreign Office, March 11, 1881.

when the French Chamber was considering a proposal to subsidize the export of crystallized sugar, the West India Committee resolved to seek the support of other groups "in a general agitation . . . without any restriction as to the form in which such agitation should be made." [53] Coöperation with the Refiners was easily arranged, but in other quarters there was some difficulty. The Liverpool Sugar Association replied that although willing to lend cordial support, they "were not disposed to take any active part in promoting the agitation among the working men." The Glasgow Association were willing to protest against bounties, but, being staunch free traders, saw no reason to "depart from their former position as to countervailing duties." [54] With this limited support the agitation lapsed after two well-publicized Mansion House meetings under the Lord Mayor.[55]

A rather more elaborate campaign was undertaken in 1884 when the West India Committee became absorbed in forwarding a proposed United States–West Indian commercial treaty, under the terms of which West Indian sugar was to be admitted free in the United States market. To the planters, who felt that they were kept out of the British market only by the short-sighted commercial policy of the mother country, the treaty seemed to offer admirable compensation.[56] It came to grief, however, against the opposition of the permanent officials at the Board of Trade, who stood guard like watchdogs over Britain's free-trade principles. Thomas Farrer, permanent secretary, pointed out that the draft treaty placed the American, not the British interpretation on the most-favored-nation clause; that is to say, concessions made by the contracting parties were to be generalized to include only those nations which offered an equivalent consideration in return, not, as was the British practice, all those which signed most-favored-nation treaties.[57] Another clause to which Farrer took exception would have confined the reciprocal tariff concessions to goods carried in vessels belonging to one or the other contracting parties.[58] The West India Committee struggled vainly. Nevile Lubbock, serving in Washington as technical adviser in the negotiations, put the Committee's

[53] West India MSS, June 5 and July 4, 1884. [54] *Ibid.*, Aug. 7, 1884.
[55] *Times*, June 23 and July 14, 1884.
[56] *Parliamentary Papers*, Lubbock-West, [c. 4340], p. 19. [57] *Ibid*, p. 21.
[58] Board of Trade MSS, Farrer-Foreign Office, Jan. 13, 1885.

case before British Ambassador West.[59] In London there were meetings, memorials, and the usual batch of letters to the *Times*.[60] But Farrer's views prevailed, and Lord Granville at length wrote West that Great Britain could not adopt the draft treaty.[61]

In the long run the main object of the sugar interests was to obtain what the Select Committee of 1880 had recommended: an International Sugar Conference for the suppression of bounties and recognition of the principle that countervailing duties were legitimate means of nullifying their effects. To this end both planters and refiners directed most of their efforts during the eighties and nineties.[62] Leadership was in the hands of the West India Committee, but for obvious reasons the planters preferred to work through other organizations compassing refiners and workers and giving the impression of rising above special interest. Thus, in the early eighties, the National Anti-Bounty League was put forward as the voice of the combined sugar industry; [63] and later, with colonialism in the air, the British and Colonial Anti-Bounty Association was formed.[64]

The first task of these organizations was to keep the question alive in the public mind. This they did, particularly at election time, with a stream of pamphlets, meetings, memorials, and letters to the press.[65] Their second task was to arouse opinion in Parliament. In 1882 advances were made to Edward Clarke, M.P., with

[59] *Parliamentary Papers,* [c. 4340], pp. 6, 19.

[60] *Times,* April 5, Aug. 13, Nov. 28, 1884, and Jan. 22, 1886, for example.

[61] *Parliamentary Papers,* [c. 4340], pp. 20–23.

[62] The West India Committee had asked for such a conference before the Select Committee of 1880 recommended it. See Hill-Granville correspondence, containing a long review of the Committee's efforts, in *Times,* Jan. 25, 1882.

[63] West India MSS, March 9, 1882; *Times,* Aug. 4, 1885.

[64] It is possible that the plan to form the British and Colonial Anti-Bounty Association originated with the Refiners. In February, 1887, the West India Committee received from them a letter expressing the hope of forming a "combination of the Refining and Colonial interests for the purpose of dealing effectively with the Bounty question during the present session of Parliament." West India MSS, Feb. 3, 1887. But leadership quickly passed to the West India Committee, which convened a meeting at the Cannon Street Hotel, where the British and Colonial Anti-Bounty Association was formed, Feb. 10, 1887. Nevile Lubbock was elected chairman, and representatives of the various sugar-growing colonies were placed on the Committee. The Liverpool Sugar Refiners were represented by T. O. Easton. A little later James Duncan of the British Refiners was given a place on the Committee. West India MSS, Feb. 3, 1887; *West Indian Circular,* No. 10, Feb. 22, 1887; *Times,* April 12, 1887.

[65] *Times,* April 8 and Aug. 4, 1885; April 21, Aug. 21, 1886. See also *West Indian Circular,* No. 9, Jan. 10, 1887, summarizing action against bounties in 1886.

the object of raising the bounty question in the House of Commons.[66] Four years later "Various suggestions were made with regard to forming a Parliamentary party on the bounty question to be carried out as soon as members come to town for the session." [67] Lord Claude Hamilton was invited to be leader of the movement, but while pledging assistance, he declined "to accept . . . on account of other work." [68]

Parliament's absorption in the Irish debates temporarily paralyzed action on all save essential matters, but in 1886, when the shattered party lines fell together behind a Conservative Government, the bounty question moved gradually to the fore. Unlike their Liberal predecessors, Conservatives had not, on the whole, a doctrinaire antagonism to discussion of the tariff. Taking advantage of the new climate of opinion, the sugar interests succeeded at last in 1887 in forming a "parliamentary committee." [69] It was known that the Government was already considering opening negotiations with foreign powers on the question of bounties; [70] and in July came the long-awaited announcement that interested governments were being invited to send representatives to an International Conference.[71]

That the Conference did not issue in effective action was no fault of the sugar interests, who were active in the lobbies throughout. First an effort was made to load the British delegation with men favorably disposed toward countervailing duties. An attempt to exclude orthodox Board of Trade experts failed, but after the Anti-Bounty Association had exerted pressure, the Government included in the delegation a friendly member of the Colonial Office, Lord Onslow.[72] The pressure was not relaxed when the Conference was in session. A deputation from the Anti-Bounty Association, calling on the leader of the British delegation, were told

[66] West India MSS, March 9, 1882. [67] West India MSS, Dec. 21, 1886.

[68] *Ibid.*, Jan. 6 and 20, 1887.

[69] *West Indian Circular,* No. 12, April 18, 1887. When Stanhope became Colonial Secretary in August, 1886, a deputation supported by forty M.P.'s waited upon him to urge an international sugar conference and the promotion of a trade agreement between the colonies and the United States. *West Indian Circular,* No. 9, Jan. 10, 1887. In 1887 the most outspoken champion of the cause in the House of Commons was H. Kimber of Wandsworth. See *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates,* 3d Ser., Vol. 316, Col. 1593; Vol. 319, Col. 343; and Vol. 318, Cols. 926 and 1534.

[70] *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates,* 3d Ser., Vol. 308, Col. 781.

[71] *Ibid.*, Vol. 316, Col. 1593. [72] *Times,* Nov. 16 and 26, 1887.

that the Government were "determined as far as it is in our power to put a stop to the bounty system. . . . The question of fair trade, however, is in no way before the Conference . . . and if it has been discussed it has been only by those persons free to express their independent opinions." [73]

The formula reached at the Conference bound signatory powers either to prohibit importation of bounty-fed sugar or to erect countervailing duties "which must necessarily exceed the amount of the bounty." [74] Free trade, said a Government spokesman, was not in question; the Government were merely attempting, as they had in the Merchandise Marks Act of 1887, to put a stop to unfair trade practices.

Almost anyone could have told him, however, that the merest mention of duties would bring thunderbolts on his head. "Sugar," said Gladstone, "is the article second only to corn among the comforts of the population. . . . I need hardly say, every Liberal will resist." [75] The resistance was tooth and nail. The *Times* bristled with letters from outraged free traders; the Cobden Club issued floods of leaflets; and at the height of the agitation a mass meeting in St. James's Hall, after a fifteen minute disturbance in the gallery, denounced the Convention as a "skillfully engineered attempt to assail that principle of Free Trade which is the cause of national prosperity." [76] The sugar interests, returning blow for blow, held a counterdemonstration which ended when a gang of ruffians forced an entry into the hall.[77]

Clearly, the question of bounties was not one which could be dealt with "above party" as the Government hoped. Conservatives found themselves drifting willy-nilly toward the battleground of free trade and protection, where, owing to their dependence on

[73] *Ibid.*, Dec. 9, 1887; see *Ibid.*, Nov. 24, 1887, for account of a similar deputation; and *ibid.*, Oct. 28, 1887, for account of a deputation from the Liverpool Refiners.

[74] Article VII of the Convention adopted Aug. 30, 1888. *Parliamentary Papers*, [c. 5577], p. 447. The Convention was to be in force from Sept. 1, 1891.

[75] *Times*, Oct. 16, 1889.

[76] See *Times*, Oct. 3, 12, 16, 26, 27, and Nov. 16, 1888; June 6, 8, 13, 15 and 27, 1889; and in particular a letter from Sir William Harcourt, *ibid.*, May 13, 1889. See also Cobden Club *Leaflets*, XLIII, L, LV, LXIV, LXVI–LXXVIII. Concerning the St. James's Hall meeting, see *Times*, May 15, 1869. The meeting was sponsored by the London Liberal and Radical Union. See also A. G. Gardiner, *Sir William Harcourt*, II, 120.

[77] *Times*, May 25, 1889.

Liberal Unionists, they dared not for the moment tread. The only course open, and the course followed in the end, was to postpone action until the uproar had somewhat abated, and then quietly to withdraw the bill. This they did in 1890.[78]

The anti-bounty campaign had, thus far, fallen considerably short of its authors' largest hopes. The International Sugar Convention was still-born. The proposed commercial treaty between the United States and the West Indies had failed. Foreign bounties were spreading and growing, and no steps whatever had been taken either to curb them or to neutralize their effects.[79] Yet this was far from the whole picture. The agitation had been kept alive during the trying period when minor agitations perished by the dozen in the white heat of the Irish debates. Not only had it been kept alive; it had begun to assume the stature of what Lord Salisbury liked to call "proximate questions"—questions matured by discussion and ripe for action. The commercial treaty with the United States might have been adopted without ado had not Farrer and Giffen stood at the controls in the Board of Trade; and with a wider margin of security in Parliament, the Government would no doubt have forced a show-down on the issue of the International Convention.[80] Here was progress, and the reasons for it were not far to seek. The bounty question, like Fair Trade, had been brought to the attention of the laboring classes; and by 1889 the movement had a sizable following which no government could entirely ignore.

ORGANIZED LABOR AND THE ANTI-BOUNTY AGITATION

There is little doubt that the action of foreign bounties had caused considerable discontent among workers, although statistical estimates of their hardship varied sharply. A Workmen's Committee claimed that 10,000 men had been employed in loaf-sugar

[78] The Bill was 52 Victoria. See *Parliamentary Papers,* 1889 (194) viii. 185. See also Sir T. H. Farrer, *The Sugar Convention.*

[79] The import of raw cane sugar from British possessions had fallen from 5,561,395 cwts. in 1879 to 3,180,483 cwts. in 1887. In the same period the import of raw sugar from beet-growing countries had risen from 3,397,793 cwts. to 9,223,856 cwts. The import of refined sugar from beet-growing countries had risen from 2,572,165 to 6,220,453!

It is interesting to note that of the 9,223,856 cwts. of raw beet sugar imported in 1887, 7,658,481 cwts. came from Germany. In 1872 Germany had sent only 341,856 cwts. See *Parliamentary Papers,* 1888 (353) xciii. 527.

[80] Such a convention was actually signed in 1901.

refining in 1864 and that by 1880 the industry was shattered utterly. Gladstone, on the other hand, asserted that no more than 1,130 such jobs had failed and that expansion of moist sugar manufacture, involving employment of 1,800 new "hands," had more than taken up the slack.[81] The truth was that disruption of the sugar trade and the action of foreign shipping bounties had brought hardship to unnumbered laborers outside the refineries —seamen, shipwrights, carmen, and ironworkers, for example [82]— and workers in other trades feared that it was only a matter of time before they too would feel the pinch. "It happens to be the sugar industry today," so the thought ran, "but it might be the engineering, the textile, the clothing, or woodwork trades tomorrow." [83] One judges that there was some suffering and much apprehension, but beyond this it is difficult to go.

The West India Committee and the British Sugar Refiners naturally desired to enlist the support of workers, and there is abundant evidence that, with every good intention, they went to considerable expense to do so. It is not surprising that one of the first workmen with whom they dealt was the familiar Samuel Peters. Peters was himself a sugar operative, and after 1877 frequently called attention to the hardship of that industry.[84] It is probable that he was collaborating with the sugar interests in April, 1878, for about that time, together with his friend Thomas Kelly, he helped form the "Workmen's National Association for the Abolition of Foreign Sugar Bounties." [85] In the same year, 1878, the pair were permitted to take seats at the Trades' Union Congress, although Kelly's credentials aroused suspicion, and there was a general fear that both were in the pay of "sugar capitalists." Once on the floor, they "caused a scene in attempting to discuss the sugar bounty question, but Congress would have none of their nonsense, and the 'next business' resolution settled them." [86]

By May, 1880, workmen, refiners, and planters were working

[81] *Parliamentary Papers,* 1881 (317) lxxxiii. 681. [82] *Ibid.,* 1888 [c. 5259] xciv. 1.

[83] London Trades' Council, *29th Annual Report* (1889).

[84] Bristol Trades' Council Minute Book, quoted in Webb MSS, A–III–5–261ff.

[85] See advertisement in *Morning Post,* Aug. 16, 1881. In June, 1878, the Association was soliciting the support of the London Trades' Council. London Trades' Council MSS, June 11, 1878. For an example of the Association's early meetings, see *Monetary Gazette,* April 12, 1879.

[86] Davis, *British Trades' Union Congress,* I, 72.

hand-in-glove. A public meeting at the Mansion House was convened by a letter over the signatures of Nevile Lubbock for the West India Committee, George Martineau for the Master Refiners, and Peters and Kelly, joint secretaries of the Workmen's Association. The object was to bind together all groups dependent on sugar in a united effort to secure a countervailing "duty on Bounty-fed Sugar." [87] Henceforth the movement grew rapidly, and Kelly claimed that one meeting was attended by 7,000 persons.[88] Among the newcomers were John McLean, representing the Scottish Workmen's Association; Sir Algernon Borthwick, editor of the protectionist *Morning Post;* Ecroyd and Lloyd of the Fair Trade League; and C. P. Ritchie, who sat in Parliament for Tower Hamlets, where several large refineries were located.[89] Ritchie, setting a new pace, led a deputation of workmen to call upon Gladstone; later, with the help of the West India Committee, a similar group gained admission to the conference room of the House of Commons, where they were cordially received by interested members.[90]

After these hopeful beginnings, the Workmen's Association rapidly lost face. On the heels of the scandal raised by Peters and Kelly at the Trades' Union Congress came damaging revelations of an attempt to bring the London Trades' Council into the anti-bounty campaign. The secretary of the London Council, George Shipton, had spoken independently against bounties, and in 1880 was approached by the Workmen's Association.[91] Shortly after, he launched, with the endorsement of the London Council, a newspaper called the *Labour Standard,* which advocated and provided a forum for Fair Trade and anti-bounty views.[92] Henry Broadhurst wrote that "There is good ground for believing that the *Standard* was established to convert the Unions to the Sugar Bounty Move-

[87] *Foreign Export Bounties and Free Trade in Sugar. 1880.* See also *British Empire,* May 29, 1880.

[88] *Morning Post,* July 18, 1881; *Daily News,* March 31, 1881; Bradford *Observer,* March 31, 1881; and *Economist,* Oct. 23, 1880.

[89] Birmingham *Daily Post,* May 11, 1881; Manchester *Guardian,* Aug. 10, 1881.

[90] Bradford *Observer,* May 19 and June 29, 1881; *Times,* May 24, 1882.

[91] *Labour Standard,* Oct. 22, 1881.

[92] London Trades' Council MSS, Jan. 11, 1881. *Labour Standard,* May 21, June 25, July 9, 1881, for example. H. J. Pettifer of the National Fair Trade League was a frequent contributor. A leading article endorsed the utterances of "the new member from Preston, Mr. Ecroyd, who speaks not as an agitator, but as a legislator, with practical good sense." *Labour Standard,* June 18, 1881.

ment"; [93] and the charge was made that Shipton had been paid £118 for his work in behalf of the Anti-Bounty League.[94] Shipton at once denied the allegations, pointing out that he had advocated "suitable measures for the abolition of bounties" long before the League was founded.[95] Later he produced letters showing that he had received only £23 from the National Anti-Bounty League "for certain expenses out of pocket" and that he had frequently attended meetings "to advocate the abolition of foreign bounties without any remuneration whatever, and at personal pecuniary sacrifice to himself." [96]

Shipton's name was saved, but the National Anti-Bounty League and its subsidiary Workmen's Association were seriously discredited. One could grant that the sums paid were merely for "out of pocket" expenses; but the fact remained that sums were paid, and what they bought was protectionist agitation among workers. Joseph Chamberlain spoke what many suspected when he said the Workmen's Association was a "sham Association with precious little workmen about it. It is got up and paid by a few West Indian planters, who want to make a profit out of an increased price of sugar." [97] The sugar interests must have seen that it was high time to part with Peters and Kelly. At all events, relations seem to have been quietly dropped.[98]

The next time the planters solicited the support of labor they dealt directly with Shipton and the London Trades' Council. In 1886, when the agitation for an international conference was nearing its peak, Nevile Lubbock appeared twice at Council meetings "to explain the loss to English labor caused by the bounty system." [99] Cautious at first, the Council merely accepted Lubbock's offer to read a paper and made it clear that members were "not committed to—nor opposed to—the subject involved in the paper." [100] After Lubbock's second appearance it was mutually agreed

[93] Broadhurst's notes, quoted in Webb MSS, A–I–6–439.

[94] Letter from R. H. Armit, printed in the *Echo*, Oct. 3, 1881.

[95] *Echo*, Oct. 6, 1881.

[96] *Labour Standard*, Oct. 22, 1881.

[97] *Times*, Nov. 13, 1885.

[98] In 1884 a delegation of sugar workmen visited the Continent to make a comparative study of conditions in the sugar industry. Their expenses were paid in part by the National Anti-Bounty League. *Times*, Aug. 29, Sept. 8, 10, and 26, 1884. It is not possible to say whether Peters and Kelly were members of the delegation.

[99] *West Indian Circular*, No. 9. Jan. 10, 1887.

[100] London Trades' Council MSS, Oct. 7, 1886.

"that the subject should be revived at a subsequent time," and the West India Committee voted *to raise a fund* to help the London Trades' Council with its meetings.[101]

Results were not long in coming. In March, 1887, a large meeting of delegates from all the London trades voted, with only one dissentient, "that Foreign State Bounties are a violation of the principle of Free Trade, and urged the government to take such measures as it may deem expedient, consistent with Free Trade principles, to secure their immediate abolition." [102] Shipton then wrote to trades' councils in all parts of the kingdom requesting them to pass similar resolutions and to appoint representatives to accompany a deputation to the Prime Minister.[103] More than 220 executive councils responded with resolutions, and in July a deputation claiming to represent half a million organized workers called upon Lord Salisbury.[104] The following year, at the suggestion of the London Council, a national conference of organized trades met in London to protest against bounties and spur the Government to action.[105]

It was almost inevitable that a campaign of this magnitude would raise the suspicion that "sugar capitalists" were supplying the funds, as indeed it turned out they were. The London *Star* charged that the anti-bounty agitation had cost the London Council "very nearly £1,000, while the total income of the Council for the year was only £188/15/2." The money, it was said, had been furnished by "the Tory Party," and "not a penny had come from the Council's income." [106] It would appear that these allegations were based on information supplied by W. C. Peacock, leader of a clique opposing Shipton in the London Council.[107] Peacock later wrote the editor of the *Star* that the anti-bounty agitation had begun "when the leading sugar capitalists invited the members of the Council to

101 West India MSS, December 9, 1886; London Trades' Council, *27th Annual Report* (1887).

102 London Trades' Council MSS, March 10, 1887. The phrase "consistent with Free Trade principles" was loosely construed. It did not rule out "a countervailing duty equal to the bounty, and continued only so long as the bounty was maintained." *Times,* Nov. 30, 1887.

103 London Trades' Council MSS, June 2, 1887.

104 London Trades' Council, *29th Annual Report* (1889).

105 London Trades' Council MSS, Feb. 2, 1888; *Conference of Delegates from the Organized Trades.*

106 *Star* (London), May 10, 13, 1889; also May 3, 1889.

107 London Trades' Council MSS, May 2, 1889.

a soirée at a certain restaurant in Fleet Street." In particular, he claimed to know that the sugar interests had paid the expenses of country delegates who accompanied the deputation to Lord Salisbury.[108]

While Shipton's defense revealed that there was some truth in these charges, there was no evidence that his intentions were anything but honorable.[109] His policy was evidently known well in advance by the members of the Council, in whose view the acceptance of such assistance was entirely within the bounds of correct union policy. Shipton showed that a full delegates' meeting had, with only two dissentients, authorized him to call anti-bounty conferences "with the full knowledge that the expenses would be defrayed by a subscription apart from the Council fund." The conferences had been attended by a total of 164 delegates, who were paid on the basis adopted by the Trades' Union Congress: that is, 10*s.* 6*d.* to London delegates for the loss of a day's work, plus all expenses; and more to out-of-town delegates, according to the distance traveled. Shipton insisted that "no money had come from any party—much less the Tory party"; rather, that "members of all the great Reform and Liberal Clubs had subscribed toward the expenses, but purely from an industrial standpoint." While denying that so much as £1,000 had been subscribed, he warded off a proposed inquiry into this matter by insisting that "the two main issues were—first, had the money come from the Tory Party—and second, had it been honestly expended for the purposes for which it had been subscribed." He later produced

> the whole of the accounts, including the names of the subscribers and the amounts of money received and disbursed . . . and a letter . . . from the subscribers, expressing their full satisfaction at the proper expenditure of the money . . . as attested by one of their number who . . . had been present on both occasions and superintended the payment for out of pocket expenses to the delegates.

After "due examination" the Council resolved that it was "thoroughly satisfied," [110] and twenty members signed a letter to the *Star,* denouncing its "unjust attack." [111]

[108] *Star* (London), May 24, 1889.

[109] London Trades' Council MSS, May 16, 1889, containing full report of Shipton's defense.

[110] *Ibid.,* June 6, 1889.

[111] *Ibid.,* July 25, 1889.

THE WORKERS' ANTI-BOUNTY MOVEMENT AND FAIR TRADE

This bare account of the scandals and successes of the workers' anti-bounty movement leaves several vital questions unanswered. For example, how many workers were involved? Was their aim to restore free trade by defeating bounties, or were they really protectionists? And finally, where did the anti-bounty workers stand in regard to the Fair Trade League?

Unfortunately, the number of workers involved cannot be accurately determined. The upper limits are suggested by the fact that George Shipton's attempt to introduce the bounty question at the Trades' Union Congress of 1888 came off rather badly.[112] Yet the anti-bounty movement was no tempest in a teapot. The lower limits must include, in addition to sugar workers, a generous number from other trades, many of whom were affected or feared that they would soon be affected by the action of bounties. Support came from the Trades' Councils of London, Liverpool, Oldham, Nottingham, Belfast, and Bristol, as well as from such diverse organizations as the Kent and Sussex Labourers, the National Labour Electoral Association, the Boiler Makers and Shipbuilders, the Amalgamated Railway Servants, and the Journeyman Felt Hatters.[113] The claim of the London Trades' Council that societies containing 423,883 members had endorsed the movement was without doubt a little topheavy; but it seems unlikely that the strictest analysis would reduce the figure by much more than half.[114]

It is worth recalling that in the eighties British workers were largely untouched by the socialist doctrine of an irrepressible class conflict and that they frequently identified their well-being with the well-being of the trade in which they happened to be engaged. A worker employed by a firm whose business suffered from foreign competition or foreign tariffs was at least as likely to join his employer in advocating protection as he was to join other workers in advocating a strike. There was ample evidence of this tendency in towns like Sheffield and Birmingham, where certain export trades declined with dramatic suddenness upon the imposition of

[112] *Times*, Sept. 4, 1888. [113] *Parliamentary Papers*, 1888 [c. 5259] xciv. 1.
[114] See the critical appraisal of the figures in *Echo*, May 3, 1889.

new tariffs abroad.[115] "What is to become of the 'hands,' " many a worker asked, "when England's immense export trade begins to shrink down every year instead of expanding?" [116]

The anti-bounty workers, like many of their employers, did all in their power to hide the fact that they were protectionists. No labor leader could afford to waver in his devotion to the "cheap loaf," and since time out of mind the "cheap loaf" and free trade had been popularly taken as faces of the same coin. When one demanded a tariff, therefore, one frequently did so in the name of free trade, not Fair Trade or protection. The masquerade made good politics, but perplexing logic. What was happening—and a few like Lord Salisbury saw it—was that in many quarters tariffs were coming to be regarded not with reference to the doctrinaire principles popularized by Cobden and Bright, but pragmatically, tariff by tariff, article by article, country by country.[117] The question was not so much free trade or protection; but rather, How much free trade?—How much protection?—Protection for what and against whom? If a tax on corn meant rising bread prices, it was folly to advocate it; but if a tax on sugar or matches meant protection for British labor, it was equal folly to raise the false alarm of the "dear loaf." Yet such was the power of old catchwords, that while many a "Free Trader" demanded tariffs, they were rare indeed who answered to the name "Fair Trader"; and of self-confessed "protectionists" there were virtually none.

The contradictions of the position were obvious, however, and it did not take much looking to see that important changes were being wrought. The anti-bounty workers insisted, most of them, that their aim was to restore "free trade"; all they wanted was an international conference for the suppression of bounties. But everyone agreed that an international convention without a penal clause would be a "simple illusion"; and a penal clause, purely and simply, meant either prohibitions or countervailing duties. It was

[115] *Fair Trade*, July 18 and 25, 1890; Mundella to J. D. Leaderer, August 24, 1890, Mundella MSS; *Times*, Oct. 6, 1890, Jan. 15, 1891. These show reactions to the McKinley Tariff. But the same thing had occurred, on a smaller scale, much earlier; *see* Garvin, *Joseph Chamberlain*, II, 121–22, and Jeyes and How, *Sir Howard Vincent*, pp. 168–69.

[116] *Labour Standard*, June 18, 1881.

[117] For an early expression of this view see the article entitled "Is Political Economy a Science?" *Quarterly Review*, Jan., 1879, pp. 182–202.

said, somewhat apologetically, that "The effect of such a clause is precisely the practice of Trade Societies in their efforts for the common elevation of labour"—in other words, the boycott applied internationally. But it was difficult to pursue such thoughts as these without straying off the Cobdenite reservation; without, for example, going on to attack the "academic school" of economists, which, while not actually defending bounties, "deprecates any interference with them." [118]

Did the Cobden Club say that consumers benefitted from the cheapening effects of bounties?

> There is a line of cheapness [came the reply] below which nothing but the degradation of the workers is the result. . . . The insatiable demand for the lowest price . . . is the curse of modern industrial life. . . . Much might be done by a healthy public determination *to encourage native production in preference to so-called cheap importation.*[119]

The time for mincing words was past. "As to free trade," George Shipton was quoted as saying while presiding over the Trades' Union Congress of 1888, it was the "old nostrum . . . that they should buy in the cheapest . . . market quite irrespective of the conditions of labour. . . . If such was to be the case they might as well import Oriental labour, endorse the sweating system, and approve of the slave trade." [120] The cards were on the table. If the "demon of cheapness" [121] was what free traders wanted, then not a few workers were quitting the game.

Yet for all this, the anti-bounty workers remained, on the whole, at a discreet distance from the Fair Trade League. Suspicions aroused by the League's attempted *coup* at the Congress of 1881 were not easily dispelled, and many workers were unable to forget that Fair Trade stood not only for industrial protection, but for the dreaded food tax as well.[122] In face of this hostility, Fair Traders

[118] London Trades' Council, *29th Annual Report.*

[119] *Daily News,* July 21, 1888; letter from the London Trades' Council deputation. Italics mine.

[120] *Times,* Sept. 4, 1888. Shipton was at this time vice-chairman of the Congress' Parliamentary Committee.

[121] The phrase was Henry Broadhurst's. *Times,* Sept. 4, 1888. Needless to say, Broadhurst, whatever his views on "cheapness," did not go along with Shipton on the matter of protection.

[122] The London Trades' Council once called a national conference of organized trades for the purpose of showing that the anti-bounty campaign was, at heart, free

decided in the late eighties and nineties to let well enough alone. Their program, they said, offered protection to employers and employees alike, but since their advances had met with no response from the unions, they would wait now for the mountain to move to Mohammed. This standpat attitude was strengthened by the fact that the League's country members were fearful lest industry receive an undue primacy in the Fair Trade program.[123] It would have taken no little ingenuity to court the workers, who wanted the "cheap loaf," without losing the affection of farmers, who wanted the "dear loaf." When the Fair Trade League deliberately chose the farmers, there was no going back.

Not that Fair Traders surrendered their interest in the labor question. While no longer dealing with established unions, they did encourage the formation of "independent" workers' protectionist societies. The most important of these was the Workmen's Association of the Defense of British Industry, founded by H. J. Pettifer, an itinerant organizer with a rough and ready eloquence and a long record of collaboration with employer groups.[124] The Workmen's Association attained considerable influence over the old Conservative Party Workingmen's Associations, and, at the instigation of Howard Vincent, the mettlesome M.P. from Sheffield, became the spearhead of a protectionist revolt which greatly embarrassed party leaders. This is a story belonging properly in an-

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trade and had nothing to do with the Fair Trade League. London Trades' Council MSS, Feb. 2, 1888; also *Conference . . . in Favour of Free Trade and Condemnatory of Foreign Bounties.*

[123] *Fair Trade,* Aug. 3, 1888.

[124] Between 1881 and 1884 Pettifer served as one of the Fair Trade League's busiest lecturers; as a Liberal and a workman, he was a rare find. In 1884 he left the League after deciding that he could not conscientiously advocate a tax on food. See biographical sketch in *Fair Trade,* Nov. 25, 1887.

Pettifer then joined H. J. Guerrier, a retired businessman and a protectionist, in founding a Society for the Defense of British Industry. Guerrier furnished most of the funds, but was later assisted by a "committee of earnest men" who were attracted by the Society's program. *Ibid.,* Nov. 25, 1887, Jan. 16 and 30, 1891. See also Rowley and Pettifer, *Free Trade versus Fair Trade* and Guerrier, *Philosophy of Cheap.*

After splitting with Guerrier, Pettifer founded the Workmen's Association for the Defense of British Industry. By this time he had gravitated from Liberalism to Conservatism and found it in his conscience to advocate food duties once more. After giving up his trade, he became full-time secretary of the Association, which received financial help from one David Evans, a businessman of the City, the Fair Trade League, and Howard Vincent and his friends. *Fair Trade,* Nov. 11 and 25, 1887; July 5, 1889. For Evans's views see his letter to the *Labour Electour,* March 15, 1890; see also *Times,* Dec. 14, 1895.

other chapter.[125] Here it is enough to note the close partnership between the Workmen's Association and the Fair Trade League. Their programs were, in all important respects, identical; in 1887, when a common fund was established, Fair Traders subscribed £5,000, including £1,000 from S. C. Lister; and later, a "United Labour Committee" was formed to coördinate relations.[126] This new approach to labor had obvious limitations, however. Pettifer had not a wide following, and his close association with Howard Vincent and protectionist Conservatives gave the group a political orientation distasteful to many workers. The Workmen's Association became a pressure group within the Conservative Party, thereby surrendering all pretence of representing the mass of workers. To many it was a "snare and a delusion," a renegade body, which had "sold out" the true interests of labor.

When the decade of the nineties opened, it was clear that Fair Trade, in so far as it aimed to rally the laboring masses, had missed the boat. Even the anti-bounty movement, after spending most of its strength in the agitation for an international conference, began to decline. The trade-union movement in Britain was entering a new and fateful phase of its history. Disturbing doctrines were falling from the lips of men like Keir Hardy and Ben Tillet; and doctrine was soon followed by "devilment." It was more than an antiquarian interest which prompted a correspondent of *Fair Trade* to remark meaningfully in 1889 that "This year is the centenary of the French Revolution." [127] Strikes at Bryant and May, Silvertowne, and the London Docks were followed by one in Lister's own establishment, which lasted twenty-one weeks. Lister claimed, with considerable justice it seems, that as a result of the McKinley Tariff his export business to the United States "was almost annihilated." [128] Fair Trade pamphlets urged that until cheap foreign competition had been dealt with, workers who demanded higher standards

[125] See pp. 67–70.

[126] *Fair Trade,* Nov. 3 and 11, 1887, and July 5, 1889. I have seen handbills bracketing the names of the two organizations.

The Workmen's Association was founded for "the advocacy, in the interests of labour, of the imposition of import duties upon foreign production, other than raw material, competing with British and Irish industry; and the granting of preferential rates to Indian and Colonial grain." See *The Competition of Foreigners,* issued by the Workmen's Association for the Defense of British Industry.

[127] *Fair Trade,* April 5, 1889.

[128] Lister, *Fair Trade versus Free Trade.*

were trying to lift themselves by the bootstraps. But time was running out and militant doctrines were running in, and the Fair Trade League learned too late that its hopes for labor peace were merely pious wishing.

III

TARIFF REFORM AND THE CONSERVATIVE PARTY 1881-1895

ORGANIZED CONSERVATISM gave tariff reform a better hearing than did organized labor. For protectionists, Fair Traders, and tariff reformers of every description, all roads led directly to the Conservative Party. During the sixties and seventies Conservatives had, for the most part, bowed to the imperatives of the "cheap loaf." But there remained many like Lowther and Rutland who kept the "poor dim tapers of protection hopefully flickering" and many more like Salisbury who were "scornfully critical of the lofty claims of Cobdenite orthodoxy." [1] Whenever protectionist whisperings were heard—as they occasionally were even at the noontide of free trade—they issued invariably from the Conservative side. And during the eighties, the whispering became a tumult.

THE CONSERVATIVE DRIFT TOWARD TARIFF REFORM: 1881–1886

When the Fair Trade League was formed, Tories were still smarting under their defeat of 1880, and it may have been, as John Bright said, that they were "hard up for a topic." [2] In any event, the ink on the Fair Trade *Manifesto* of 1881 was scarcely dry when they began to polish up the old weapon of protection. In September Gladstone complained bitterly against "the 'Fair Trade' imposture and the use made of it by the Tories to repair some portion of their defeats." [3] And Mundella, watching Fair Trade grow in Sheffield, wrote: "The Tories seem to have lost all grasp of principles.

[1] Lady Gwendolen Cecil, *Salisbury*, I, 337.
[2] Manchester *Examiner and Times*, Sept. 12, 1881.
[3] Gladstone MSS, Gladstone to Halifax, Sept. 18, 1881.

. . . Protection, Fair Trade, and even Irish discontent, is turned to account." [4]

Beneath this Liberal smoke there was no lack of Tory fire. In a single month, three Conservative candidates declared for protection at by-elections, and many local party associations and workingmen's clubs passed protectionist resolutions.[5] The Lancashire Union of Conservative Associations, for example, resolved "that the principle at present pursued by England of meeting hostile tariffs with free imports is not only economically unsound, but utterly ruinous in practice," and urged "that the time has now arrived when a reversal of such policy is imperatively necessary in the interests of British industry." [6] The debate moved to the House of Commons when Ritchie submitted a motion favoring countervailing duties on sugar. After Ecroyd and Ritchie had crossed swords with Chamberlain and J. K. Cross, the motion was defeated, 153 to 80. The 80 were exclusively Conservative.[7] So alarming was the count that at Gladstone's suggestion the Cobden Club printed 180,000 copies of the speeches by Chamberlain and Cross.[8] "Unless some authoritative declaration to the contrary is speedily made," said the *Economist* of September 3, 1881, "the country will be bound to assume that reciprocity has been formally adopted as part of the new Conservative platform." And the *Standard* of London, a Conservative paper, on September 6 implored party leaders to keep clear of protectionist heresies.

The gentlemen on the front opposition bench were beset with doubts. For the most part they wanted neither to silence nor to sanction Fair Trade. What was needed was a statement of policy, which, while freeing the party from the charge of protection, would

[4] Mundella MSS, A. J. Mundella to C. Leader, Sept. 2, 1881.

[5] Names: Henry de Worms, Edward Clarke, E. Hardcastle, H. Drummond Wolff, A. Staveley Hill, W. F. Tollemache, W. L. Jackson, David MacIver, Lord Henry Thynne, J. E. Mellor, Algernon Egerton, Ashmead-Bartlett, Sir Hardinge Giffard, J. H. Sidebottom, Sir H. Selvin Ibbetson, Lord Claude Hamilton, Sir R. A. Cross. Places: Deptford, Southward, Ashton-Under-Lynne-Ormskirk, Cheshire, Kidderminster, Guiseley, Coventry, Farnsworth, Kirkburton, Launceston, Tower Hamlets, Stalybridge, Shrewsbury. See Bradford *Observer,* Nov. 22, 29, 1881; Manchester *Guardian,* Aug. 1, 2, 8, 1881; *Morning Post,* June 27, July 21, 1881; Birmingham *Weekly Post,* Nov. 5, 1881; *Daily Telegraph,* Dec. 2, 1881.

[6] Manchester *Guardian,* Aug. 15, 1881.

[7] *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates,* 3d Ser., Vol. 264, Cols. 3–15; Manchester *Guardian,* Aug. 15, 1881.

[8] Manchester *Guardian,* Aug. 15, 1881; *Times,* July 31, 1882.

yet permit a measure of experimentation in constituencies where "Fair Trade winds" were stirring. Salisbury's formulation—not improvised, by the way, but representing his best thought on the subject—most nearly filled the bill. In matters of tariffs, he said, "each case could only be dealt with on its own merits." [9] England could little afford to accept discrimination by foreign powers without striking back. He could not endorse Fair Trade, or any other program which would press "upon the food of the people"; but, he added, "in spite of any formula, in spite of any cry of Free Trade, if I saw by raising the duty on luxuries, or threatening to raise it, I could exercise pressure on a foreign Power, inducing it to lower rates and give relief, I should pitch orthodoxy and formulae to the winds and exercise pressure." [10] Throughout the controversy, with a consistency rarely matched, he maintained substantially the same position.

Sir Stafford Northcote, Conservative leader in the House of Commons, tried to steer the same course, though his tacking was far less skillful. To placate Fair Traders, he appeared conspicuously with Ecroyd, MacIver, and Rutland at public meetings; [11] when he came to speak for himself, however, Liberals professed, with some justice, not to have "the slightest idea what he meant." [12] While protesting his loyalty to free trade, he insisted that England had "put herself in a false position with foreign countries in dealing upon this matter." He argued that Britain needed "the freest and widest access to the markets of the world, as well as the means of manufacturing as cheaply as possible," but observed that the home market, on the other hand, need not be neglected "if we use the right means to support our commercial interests." [13] The fog was thickest when he remarked that protection was not an "article of faith" of Conservatives but merely a "pious opinion" [14] which he himself did not share.[15] The "shifty and disingenuous coquetting of Sir Stafford Northcote" became the chief target for Liberal and Cobdenite abuse.[16]

[9] Cecil, *Salisbury,* 336. [10] Bradford *Observer,* Oct. 13, 1881.

[11] At Manchester and Sheffield. See Preston *Guardian,* June 4, 1881; Bradford *Observer,* Sept. 2, 1881.

[12] The words were Granville's; see Bradford *Observer,* Oct. 12, 1881.

[13] Bradford *Observer,* Oct. 4, 1881. [14] *Ibid.,* Oct. 12, 1881.

[15] *Ibid.,* Dec. 1, 1881.

[16] Manchester *Examiner and Times,* Dec. 31, 1881; see also Granville's speech at

Lord Randolph Churchill, with characteristic impetuosity, steered straight into the storm. Britain's system of so-called free trade, "the certain cause of the long continued depression in this country," he said bluntly, must be overthrown. Foreign markets, like oysters, needed opening with a "strong clasp knife, instead of being tickled with a feather." [17] In the event of war, Britain's food supply would be in grave peril. "Would it not be wise," he asked, "to take steps in time to draw our supplies of food from our colonies and dependencies . . . rather than remain absolutely dependent upon a foreign power [the United States] which though friendly today might be hostile tomorrow?" [18]

With this encouragement from their leaders, Tory protectionists, as long as Gladstone was in office, made the most of their opportunity "to damn without defining." What policy they would adopt if suddenly presented with a Parliamentary majority, no one could say; but their growing confidence in opposing free trade was unmistakable. There was only one brief lull. This was in 1882, when trade was distinctly better. Gladstone, in a powerful speech at Leeds, had temporarily crippled the proponents of the "great and mischievous delusion," and rebuffs at the Trades' Unions Congress and the Farmers' Alliance had given Fair Trade "almost its death blow." [19] As soon as trade was slack again, protection leaped to the fore of political discussion. On January 10, 1883, the *Times* foresaw "a period, more or less protracted, of restricted profits and consequent difficulties in trade." The Duke of Rutland seized the opportunity to address the editor on the necessity of protection, and a few months later raised the question in the House of Lords.[20] Lord Dunraven, rising rapidly in Tory circles, became president of the Fair Trade League. Lord Randolph Churchill advocated countervailing sugar duties.[21] On they talk, said the *Times*, "long after all the waters of demonstrable argument have gone over their heads." [22] Liberals were frankly worried. Mundella, in his correspondence, displayed concern at the prevalence of Fair Trade ideas

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the Iron and Steel Institute, Bradford *Observer*, Oct. 12, 1881, or *Economist*, Oct. 8, 1881.

17 Bradford *Observer*, Sept. 19, 1881. 18 *Ibid.*, Nov. 2, 1881.

19 *Times*, Oct. 8, 1881; see also Lloyd-Gladstone correspondence printed in *Times*, Oct. 21, 1881.

20 *Times*, June 11, 1883. 21 *Times*, June 7, 1884. 22 *Ibid.*, Nov. 14, 1884.

among the leading people of Sheffield.[23] The Cobden Club, fearing that newly enfranchised voters would prove susceptible to "sophistical economical arguments," laid plans to distribute preventive literature. Gladstone himself contributed twenty pounds to the Special Publications Fund.[24]

A partial test of Tory intentions came in June, 1885, when Gladstone fell, and Salisbury formed his first Government, "more than one of the members of which are well known advocates of . . . tariffs." [25] Of the men holding office, at least six—Salisbury, Northcote, Churchill, Lord George Hamilton, Sir R. A. Cross, and Sir Hardinge Giffard—had spoken favorably of protection, Fair Trade, or retaliation; and Dunraven, now an official spokesman for the Fair Trade League, was Under-Secretary for the Colonies.[26]

It was understood that protectionists refrained from acting because they were dependent upon Parnell's Irish votes, and because in Salisbury's view only a mandate from the electorate would justify a departure from free trade. To a delegation pressing for duties against bounties, the Prime Minister spoke regretfully. Armed only with exhortations, not weapons, he said, he was powerless to help. The people must decide whether the necessary weapon, a bargaining tariff, ought to be placed in his hands.[27] Here, seemingly, was a plain invitation to "the reciprocitarians" to create a public demand authorizing him to follow out policies already made his own. "Had the new Ministry come into power with an effective majority," said one observer, ". . . it would have been quite upon the cards that a reversal of the British economic policy would have been attempted." [28]

Meanwhile, the Government had shown their indifference to

[23] Mundella MSS, Mundella to C. Leader, Sept. 17, May 11, 1884.

[24] *Times,* June 30 and Dec. 27, 1884.

[25] *Chamber of Commerce Journal,* July 4, 1885.

[26] Dunraven had recently resigned as president of the League but he continued to speak for Fair Trade. See *Times,* Jan. 29 and Oct. 13, 1885; see also Dunraven, *Past Times,* II, 131.

[27] "My own view has always been that the power of modifying your fiscal system in order to defeat any oppressive action on the part of foreign countries is a power that ought very rarely to be exercised, but which you ought to possess, and that if you are known to possess it, it will very seldom be necessary that you should exercise it." *Times,* Aug. 6, 1885.

[28] *Chamber of Commerce Journal,* July 4, 1885.

Cobdenite preachments by creating the Royal Commission whose well-known report on the depression in trade and industry appeared in 1887.[29] The appointment of the Commission and the *Final Report* were closely bound up with the Fair Trade controversy. Protectionists had long demanded such an inquiry; Cobdenites had opposed it, arguing that trade would right itself without undue fuss and bother. As a result, the question became largely political. Conservatives, "tainted with protection," were favorable; Liberals, "crushed under the tyranny of economic bigotry," were opposed.[30]

When the Commissioners were being chosen in 1885, there were those who suspected an open assault on free trade. The suspicion was heightened by the announcement that Dunraven, Ecroyd, Nevile Lubbock, and P. A. Muntz, an old protectionist, would sit as members. In horror, many Liberals elected to boycott the whole enterprise. When J. K. Cross was invited to serve, Gladstone wrote him:

> No one would more effectively than yourself defend the principles of Free Trade on the proposed Commission of Inquiry. But if my opinion as to serving on it be asked, I think the whole thing unsound at the core, appointed with an indirect motive, and having no legitimate purpose; and I would "touch not, taste not, handle not." You will probably end in it as one of a protesting minority.[31]

In the same spirit, Shaw-Lefevre, William Fowler, Thomas Farrer, and G. J. Goschen refused to serve, charging that the Commission, with a protectionist bias, was not sufficiently representative to "command public confidence."[32] That these fears were greatly exaggerated is suggested by the moderate character of the majority report. All the Commissioners agreed "that the trade and industry of the country are in a condition which may fairly be described as depressed," and that "foreign tariffs and bounties, and the restrictive commercial policy of foreign countries" were among the important causes.[33] The majority, however, argued that these matters were independent of Britain's control; while protectionists had

[29] Royal Commission on the Depression, *Final Report.*

[30] *The Globe,* Sept. 26, 1885; also *Chamber of Commerce Journal,* Oct. 5, and Dec. 5, 1885.

[31] Gladstone MSS, Gladstone to Cross, July 17, 1885.

[32] *Times,* July 22, Aug. 11 and 22, Sept. 5, 1885; also *Fair Trade,* Oct. 23, 1885.

[33] Royal Commission on the Depression, *Final Report,* p. 28.

to be content with a minority report containing an elaborate statement of the Fair Trade case.[84]

Before the Commission finished its labors, Britain passed through the fire and water of the elections of 1885 and 1886. The "unauthorized program," Home Rule, and the Liberal rupture put all other questions in a secondary place, but beneath the commotion was abundant evidence that Conservatives were drifting steadily toward adoption of tariff reform. In opening the campaign of 1885 Salisbury told voters that the "Conservative desire is so to manage affairs . . . that you shall obtain an entry to markets which are now closed to you"; and later, though ruling out a return to the Corn Laws, he renewed his plea for weapons of retaliation.[85] Dunraven, now assisting in the publication of the weekly *Fair Trade*, advocated the League's program entire. He was supported by Louis Jennings, Churchill's American friend standing as candidate for Stockport. Chaplin, Ecroyd, Lowther, Lloyd, W. J. Harris, and Sir Edward Clarke swelled the chorus.[86] The protectionist appeal seemingly was most effective in manufacturing districts, and might help to explain, along with the Irish vote and memories of Gordon, why the towns generally favored Conservatives in 1885. Such Liberal leaders as Bright and Harcourt accepted protection as an important secondary issue, and dwelt upon it at length, while Hartington, encountering Fair Traders in Lancashire, "found them to be stronger than he had imagined." [87] "Fair Trade," sighed Chamberlain when the polling was over, "you have no idea what a hold it has upon the artisans." [88]

[84] Royal Commission on the Depression, *Final Report*, pp. 35, 137–43. One is perhaps entitled to wonder if the alliance with Liberal Unionists in any way softened the blows of the Commission's majority.

[85] Cecil, *Salisbury*, III, 262, 267–68. See also *Fair Trade*, Nov. 13, 1885.

[86] Dunraven, *Past Times*, II, 130–33. *Times*, Sept. 29, Dec. 12, 1885. Channing, *Memories of Midland Politics*, p. 38. Sir Edward Clarke, *The Story of My Life*.

[87] *Times*, Nov. 12, 19, and 23, 1885. Gardiner, *Sir William Harcourt*, I, 342. Holland, *Eighth Duke of Devonshire*, I, 163; II, 268.

[88] Garvin, *Joseph Chamberlain*, II, 121–22. Before the election of 1885 the Fair Trade League undertook "work of a more militant nature" than ever before. The number of provincial branches and correspondents was increased to 500. The subscription charge was lowered to 1s., and over 2,500 new members joined the Central Office, not to mention others who might have joined branches without recording their names at headquarters. During the election more than 100,000 tracts and pamphlets were circulated weekly. See *Fair Trade*, March 26, 1886, and Oct. 23, 1885. The Cobden Club entered the lists with leaflets and handbills addressed particularly to the newly enfranchised voters. See series of Cobden Club Leaflets, from 1885. George

In 1885 Fair Trade was beyond doubt "one of the leading election cries." [39] In the Home Rule election of 1886 it played, for obvious reasons, a less conspicuous part. But anyone suspecting that Conservatives had forgotten was to be set right by events soon to follow.

THE FRONT BENCH IMPOSES A CENSORSHIP: 1886–1890

It was the misfortune of Fair Traders that their agitation reached its climax when customary political alignments were shattered almost beyond recognition by the impact of the Irish Question. The formation of a Conservative Government under Lord Salisbury in August, 1886, brought meager results. Holding power by the merest thread, which Chamberlain and Hartington could have snapped in an instant, the Government faced certain defeat on the introduction of protectionist legislation. "The new party attachments were *ad hoc* and experimental, and it remained to be seen whether they could bear the strain which events would put upon them." [40] From time to time it looked as if the Government's days could be counted on the fingers of one hand—when Lord Randolph Churchill resigned in December, 1886, for example. Churchill, despite his unorthodox views on tariffs, had been Chamberlain's "only sympathetic bond with the Ministry"; and Goschen, who supplanted him, "was the last man whom Chamberlain desired to see" in his place.[41] Under the circumstances, protectionists had to be hidden away among the back benches. At the first hint of Fair Trade, said Chamberlain's son, "the Unionists would secede *en bloc*." [42]

Yet hiding Fair Trade was like concealing a hurricane behind a haycock. When, on the morrow of the Home Rule election, the League looked about to assess its gains, 69 members were found to

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Baden-Powell said the election was the first since the forties that had brought colonial-commercial questions to the fore. *Times,* Oct. 22, 1885. After the election there was lengthy and indecisive debate as to whether Fair Trade was "more largely represented in the new Parliament than in the last." See *Times,* Dec. 3, 12, and 17, 1885. *Fair Trade* took the view that the cause would be better served by Conservatives when they were freed of the responsibilities of office. It was claimed that many Tory sympathizers "have fought shy of the question for fear of injuring the existing position. . . . In opposition, however, we may look to all this being changed." *Fair Trade,* Jan. 29, 1886.

[39] *Financial Reform Almanac* for 1886, p. 2.

[40] Gardiner, *Sir William Harcourt,* II, 1.

[41] Garvin, *Joseph Chamberlain,* II, 266, 433.

[42] *Fair Trade,* Sept. 21, 1888.

be friendly to the cause.[43] Dixon-Hartland, an unmuzzled protectionist member, claimed later that had the Irish Question not spoiled his plans, he could have mustered 186 votes for protection to native industry.[44] During the early months of the Ministry, protectionists, by common consent, remained quiet, in order to further "that union of interest throughout the Empire which is the basis of the Fair Trade policy." [45] Lord Dunraven, sensing, perhaps, the embarrassment which his decided protectionist views caused the Government, resigned as Under-Secretary for the Colonies.[46] But early in 1887, after Salisbury had weathered the storm precipitated by Churchill's resignation, the protectionist bloc became restive. Following a series of private meetings, negotiations were opened with party leaders for the introduction of a protectionist motion.[47]

[43] *Fair Trade,* July 23, 1886.

[44] *Times,* Nov. 3, 1887. Protection for agriculture, he said, was far less popular. The Cobden Club claimed that after Northcote's death, the cabinet contained not a single free trader; in fact, with the exception of Ritchie, it was said that all the members of the front bench had pledged themselves to "Protection of some sort or another." *Times,* May 16, 1887. H. H. Asquith predicted that when the Tory Party "could move its own limbs and take its own course," he would find nine out of ten members "saying farewell to Free Trade, and working their best for a disguised system of Protection in this country." *Fair Trade,* Nov. 2, 1888.

[45] *Fair Trade,* Aug. 27, 1886. Henry Chaplin told the protectionist farmers of Lincolnshire that "He did not doubt the sympathies of the government were with them, but . . . they occupied an exceptionally difficult position at the present time, and he thought the last thing anyone would desire would be to force their demands upon them at an unreasonable time, or by undue persistence to place them in a position of embarrassment which the whole country would reject." *Fair Trade,* in Nov., 1886. *Fair Trade* said: "The fact must not be ignored that the Conservatives are in office by favour of a section of the Liberal Party. . . . Not until the questions of Ireland and procedure are settled in some form or another can we expect . . . to have a free hand. . . . In minor matters Lord Hartington and Mr. Chamberlain will in all probability abstain from opposition . . . but if any major question, such as that involving the reconsideration of our fiscal policy, even in the direction of Imperial Federation, were introduced, they would doubtless regard their alliance as dissolved." *Fair Trade,* Nov. 5, 1886, also Sept. 3, 1886. The Fair Trade policy was to agitate in the country until a clear protectionist majority was returned: "Agitation always, and still agitation, both indoors and outdoors, but, at this juncture, especially outdoors." *Fair Trade,* Feb. 25, 1887.

[46] He had continued to talk Fair Trade even while in office. *Times,* Oct. 18, 1886. In his letter of resignation, he indicated that although he intended to continue to support the Government, he desired more independence than a member of the Government could reasonably demand. Dunraven to Sir Henry Holland, *Times,* Feb. 10, 1887. For his continued attacks on free trade, see *Times,* April 27, 1887.

[47] *Fair Trade,* Feb. 4, 11, 25, and March 4, 1887. A little earlier, certain members from farm constituencies had formed "a sessional agricultural committee" of some 50 members, including Chaplin, Sclater-Booth, Sir E. Birkbeck, Sir R. Paget, Lord Grimston, C. W. Gray, and Lord Alcho, who were friendly toward Fair Trade. See *Fair Trade,* March 18, 1887.

The Government consented, but the pressure of Irish business, absorbing many nights usually allotted to private members, caused the debate to be canceled.[48] Salisbury tried to placate Fair Traders with the statement that he did "not imagine that differential duties in favor of our colonies, whatever may be said for or against them, can properly be described under the term Protection." [49] But this was slender satisfaction in view of his obvious intention to let the session die without granting opportunity for debate.

Louis Jennings, a leading protectionist member, complained to party leaders that their "absolute veto . . . upon my bringing the subject forward" would place many members at a "grievous disadvantage" before their constituencies. "Our votes have increased the strength of the government," he wrote the party leader in Commons, "and yet we are weakened by being deprived of every opportunity of fulfilling our emphatic and repeated pledges." [50] That many local party organizations were pressing for action, there can be no doubt. Resolutions favoring protection, Fair Trade, and commercial federation of the Empire were common among Conservative Associations in Yorkshire and the Midlands.[51] In July, 1887, the Scottish Union of Conservative Associations voted to endorse protection.[52] The pressure became so great, indeed, that the Primrose League, which previously had asked its speakers not to embarrass the Government by mention of tariffs, now gave them a free hand.[53]

At the rate Fair Trade was growing in the summer and autumn of 1887, it was obvious that with proper leadership it might cause a minor political earthquake. The annual Conservative Party Conference was to meet at Oxford in November. If the rank and

[48] *Fair Trade,* April 1, July 1 and 15, 1887. Dixon-Hartland had given notice that he would introduce a comprehensive motion covering the tariff question, but "to suit the views of Mr. W. H. Smith," this had to give way to a less sweeping motion introduced by Jennings. *Fair Trade,* Feb. 25, and March 4, 1887.

[49] *Fair Trade,* April 15, 1887.

[50] Jennings to W. H. Smith, *Fair Trade,* July 29, 1887.

[51] *Fair Trade,* Nov. 5, 1886, April 15 and July 1, 1887.

[52] *Fair Trade,* July 8, 1887. Six months earlier the Union had been silent for fear of embarrassing the Government.

[53] *Fair Trade,* April 15, 1887. Howard Vincent claimed that 52 Chambers of Commerce had officially declared that foreign tariffs, bounties, and foreign competition were the cause of the depression. *Times,* Nov. 29, 1887. Over the summer and autumn of 1887 the activity of the Fair Trade League reached new heights; speakers were sent out to more than 67 towns. *Fair Trade,* Oct. 7, 1887.

file could be persuaded to seize the occasion to pronounce emphatically in favor of Fair Trade and if a spokesman of sufficient stature came forward to confront Lord Salisbury, the Government's position would be awkward, to say the least. But although the Fair Trade League scored one success after another in local party organizations, it was no easy matter to find a leader with the necessary boldness and authority. Lord Dunraven, who might conceivably have qualified, put party loyalty first and urged Fair Traders against pressing demands which would weaken the Government's position.[54]

Lord Randolph Churchill was another to be considered. So little respect had he for political niceties that a few months earlier he had almost pushed the Government over the brink with his spectacular resignation. Fair Traders, believing that he would welcome an opportunity to place himself at the head of a popular "cause," urged him to make a positive declaration.[55] But shortly before the Party Conference their hopes were dashed. Churchill repudiated Fair Trade, because (as he said privately) "it is open to such fearful attacks from the Radicals among the country population that we should lose more than we should gain" and because (as he said publicly) "I believe that low prices in the necessaries of life and political stability in a democratic Constitution are practically inseparable, and that high prices in the necessaries of life and political instability in a democratic Constitution are also practically inseparable." [56] It began to look, indeed, as if Fair Trade, as a political movement, was destined to play the role of the headless wonder.

With Churchill and Dunraven out of the picture, a new leader emerged in the person of Howard Vincent, the dynamic member from Sheffield. Vincent never occupied a position on the front bench, but, as an imperialist who knew the Empire at first hand

[54] *Fair Trade,* Nov. 18 and 25, 1887.

[55] W. S. Churchill, *Lord Randolph Churchill,* II, 327. "Hardly a day passes," said Lord Randolph Churchill, "that I do not get letters from different people in the country of all classes imploring me to take up the question of fair trade, and to take a leading part in the movement for fair trade." Speech at Stockton, *Times,* Oct. 25, 1887.

[56] W. S. Churchill, *op. cit.,* II, 328, 330; also *Times,* Oct. 21, 1887. Lawrence Tipper recalled several years later that Churchill had told him: "Within the walls of this room I am a fair trader; but outside this room I know nothing of the question." *Times,* Dec. 14, 1895. Churchill's son takes a more charitable view. W. S. Churchill, op. cit., II, 333.

and as a shrewd reader of the public mind who articulated brilliantly what was stirring in the hearts of his constituents, he exercised considerable influence.[57] An early member of the Fair Trade League, he took up the cause in earnest in 1887, and through tireless writing, lecturing, and organizing, soon established himself as the group's most respected spokesman.[58] After sounding out party leaders, he gave notice in October that he would introduce a Fair Trade motion at the Oxford conference.[59] Meanwhile, the Fair Trade League had been sending delegations up and down the kingdom to enlist support for the protectionist revolt.[60]

What view Lord Salisbury took at this time, it is impossible to say, but no doubt his daughter states his position mildly when she characterizes Vincent's maneuver as displaying "a singular want of tact." [61] The Government's future was highly uncertain. As late as August, 1887, Chamberlain had gone into the lobby with Gladstone against suppression of the Irish National League,[62] and in the same month he was discussing with Morley the possibilities of Liberal reunion.[63] "It was a moment of life and death for the Unionist alliance." [64] Yet here was a calculated attempt by Salisbury's own followers to force him to take up a policy which undoubtedly would strain the alliance near the breaking point.

In the trial of strength which ensued at Oxford, the early innings were in Vincent's favor. On the first day he introduced a motion reading: "That the continued depression in trade and agriculture, the increase in scarcity of employment, and the consequent distress among all classes, render speedy reform in the policy of the United Kingdom as regards foreign imports and the influx of indigent foreigners a matter of vital necessity to the people of Great Britain and Ireland." From the moment Vincent rose there was no doubt as to the outcome. The delegates, some 1,000 of them, clamorously applauded supporters of the motion and rewarded opponents with derisive shouts of "No, no!" "The resolution was then put and carried by an immense majority, not more than a dozen delegates voting against it." [65] A few hours later Vincent dis-

[57] See Jeyes and How, *Sir Howard Vincent.* [58] *Fair Trade,* Nov. 11, 1887.
[59] *Times,* Nov. 29, 1887. [60] *Fair Trade,* Oct. 7, 1887.
[61] Cecil, *Salisbury,* IV, 177. [62] Garvin, *Joseph Chamberlain,* II, 309.
[63] *Ibid.,* II, 309–13. [64] *Ibid.,* II, 316.
[65] *Times,* Nov. 23, 1887; also Nov. 22, 1887.

patched a telegram to Lister, reading: "Glorious news! By 1000 to 12 the Conservative Associations of England declare for your policy." [66]

Everyone who understood the stakes that hung in the balance waited on tenterhooks for Salisbury to address the conference next day. But without entering into the merits of the Fair Trade declaration, the Prime Minister tried merely "to bring the delegates to a sense of sin for their unseasonable action." [67] There is no reason, he said, why Conservatives and Liberal Unionists could not work in harmony, since they were

> on all present questions—I lay enormous emphasis on that adjective—as close together as the various sections of the Conservative party are close together. I quite acknowledge if you go off present questions—if you go to questions which are in the far past, or to questions which are in the far future, you may find grave differences of opinion, and therefore I should deprecate any discussion that you could call merely academical and which does not come within the region of practical politics.[68]

Liberal Unionists were not easily persuaded that Fair Trade votes were "merely academical." Chamberlain had sailed for America the month before, leaving his countrymen to speculate upon his views. But Hartington gave no quarter:

> I do not think it would be possible for us to speak in too strong terms in deprecation of the adoption of such a policy as this by the Conservative party. . . . I fully admit that . . . *a retrograde policy with regard to commercial matters would be a danger so great as would threaten to endanger the strength of the Unionist cause,* and I hope the leaders of the party will weigh well the consequences before they give to it any countenance or support.[69]

As if there could be any doubt about *his* feelings, John Bright wrote with characteristic pungency: "You have observed what the Conservatives have been saying at Oxford. They return, shall I say, like a dog to his vomit." [70] G. J. Goschen, the Liberal Chancellor of the Exchequer, issued a thinly veiled warning to his Tory colleagues when he told the Maidstone Farmers' Club that he would be obliged to withdraw his subscription if the Club passed a resolution endorsing protection.[71]

[66] *Fair Trade,* Dec. 2, 1887.
[67] Cecil, *Salisbury,* IV, 178.
[68] *Times,* Nov. 24, 1887.
[69] *Ibid.,* Dec. 9, 1887. Italics mine.
[70] *Ibid.,* Nov. 29, 1887.
[71] *Ibid.,* Dec. 16, 1887.

The storm signals were unmistakable, and many Tories quickly sought cover. One after another, with ultra-protectionists like A. Staveley Hill, Lowther, and Dunraven in the lead, they pledged themselves to keep tariff reform in the background so long as it would "imperil in any way the alliance with the Liberal Unionists which had been formed in the interests of the country." [72] In a powerful speech at Derby, with Howard Vincent on the platform beside him, Salisbury protested against the impression that because Vincent had led the Fair Trade movement at Oxford, "either he or those who follow him, and still more H. M. Government, are in any way on that account committed to the doctrine of Protection." [73] Lister himself was moved to admit "that the moment chosen for the declaration of policy was inopportune"; [74] and the Executive Committee of the Fair Trade League conceded that "the 'fighting stage' of the movement, on which three months ago we seemed on the eve, is not for the present." [75]

Yet events following the Oxford Conference, unfavorable though they were to the immediate advancement of Fair Trade, offer unchallengeable evidence that the Conservative Party had abandoned the conventional doctrine of free trade. Their retreat was purely tactical, and involved no compromise of principle. In the Derby speech, in which he reassured Liberal Unionists, Salisbury added:

> Though repudiating, both in respect of corn and other matters, the doctrine of protection, I decline to make any other fiscal pledge; I decline to say how far or to what extent our fiscal system may be modified; for such questions must be dealt with simply on the merits of each individual case, and cannot be included in any general formula. I can quite imagine that many modifications of our fiscal system may be desirable. I am by no means an enthusiast for the extreme simplicity of fiscal arrangement which is due to Mr. Gladstone's introduction, but I energetically protest against being considered a protectionist, because I will not accept all the illegitimate consequences which he has deduced from free trade.[76]

At this moment the Conservative Government were negotiating with foreign powers with the intention of taking action against

[72] These were Hill's words. *Fair Trade,* Jan. 6, 1888, also *Times,* Dec. 10, Dec. 17, Dec. 31, 1887.

[73] *Times,* Dec. 20, 1887. [74] *Ibid.* [75] *Fair Trade,* Feb. 3, 1888.

[76] *Times,* Dec. 20, 1887. *Fair Trade* expressed approval of this statement, interpreting it as a rejection of perverted Fair Trade doctrine, but acceptance of the genuine article. *Fair Trade,* Jan. 6, 1888.

bounties. Cobdenites, said Salisbury, tried to justify these bounties on the grounds that prices were lowered, but they did not "see that advantages to the consumer secured by illegitimate means are only transitory in their character, and that when they have served the purpose of destroying the industry against which they have been leveled, the advantage to the consumer will cease." [77]

A few extremists, indeed, were reluctant to surrender an inch of ground. Vincent, heaping contempt upon those willing to heed "the command of 'Hold hard,' " [78] proceeded with plans to assemble a protectionist demonstration at St. James's Hall within two weeks after the Oxford Conference.[79] Three months later, just before Goschen's budget was introduced, Vincent put before the House of Commons a Fair Trade petition, 300 yards long, containing, it was claimed, 15,000 Sheffield signatures.[80] Birmingham protectionists formed a Fair Trade branch, and after a large demonstration in the Town Hall, laid plans for carrying the fight to the local wards.[81] The Land and Labor Defense Association, advocating protection for farmers, launched a campaign to establish new branches,[82] and the West of England Association called a conference of protectionist farmers in London "to thoroughly organize the country with a view to political action." [83]

Under the circumstances it is not surprising that the Government took strong measures to calm the fears of Liberal Unionists. It was said that "Party organizations, which in 1885 were so glad of the Fair Trade cry, have had strictest instructions from headquarters to leave it alone; and the rank and file who broke out at Oxford . . . have been sat upon both by local and central chiefs." [84]

In June following the Oxford Conference, Salisbury mysteriously summoned a number of party members to the Foreign Office for a discussion of Unionist relations. The secrecy with which he attempted to veil the proceedings was pierced only by an alert "news-agency," whose account, though in some respects garbled, gave what seems to be an accurate impression of the Prime Minister's remarks.[85] According to the report, Salisbury confessed that Liberal

[77] At Liverpool. *Times,* Jan. 12, 1888.
[78] *Times,* Dec. 24, 1887.
[79] *Ibid.,* Dec. 7 and 9, 1887.
[80] *Fair Trade,* March 30, 1888.
[81] *Times,* Jan. 6, 1888. *Fair Trade,* Feb. 17, 1888.
[82] *Fair Trade,* Aug. 17, 1888.
[83] *Ibid.,* July 13, 1888.
[84] *Ibid.,* "Report of Year's Progress," Dec. 28, 1888.
[85] The "news-agency's" report appeared in the *Times,* June 22, 1888; notes of

Unionists were becoming restive, and urged Conservatives to sink their secondary differences for the sake of unity. He strongly deprecated recent signs of disaffection among the Tory "left-wing," mentioning in particular that protection was "open to two opinions and need not be raised at this juncture." The urgency of Salisbury's plea is perhaps suggested by the perceptible decline in protectionist activity shortly thereafter. Even Vincent conceded that "the really effective action he wanted to take was barred for the moment by the difficulties of the political situation." [86]

It was a more formidable task to discipline the local party organizations, which, through their influence at annual conferences, were gaining the increased respect of Conservative leaders. The year following the Oxford resolution, Vincent moved, "amid loud cheers from the large majority of the delegates," that "it is vital to the Imperial interests of the British Empire to stimulate by all possible means the advantageous interchange of commerce between all its territories." [87] After some debate, which brought cheers for Fair Traders and "considerable interruption" for its opponents, the voting was postponed owing to the lateness of the hour.[88] Next morning, under the most suspicious circumstances, before the Fair Trade leaders had arrived and with only about fifty of the thousand delegates present, the motion was put aside in favor of an amendment stating that commercial matters were receiving "the attention of Lord Salisbury and his colleagues and are best left to their consideration." [89] Some of the protectionists "entered a vigorous protest against the unfair advantage" which had been taken of their late attendance, but with the consent of Vincent and Staveley Hill, the record remained unaltered.[90]

When the delegates assembled the following year at Nottingham, a motion was introduced declaring that the Conference ought to pass judgment on questions of organization only and that ques-

correction from George Curzon and G. C. T. Bartley appeared next day, but neither suggested that Salisbury's position was inaccurately described. *Times,* June 23, 1888.

[86] *Fair Trade,* Aug. 3, 1888. [87] *Times,* Nov. 5, 1888. [88] *Ibid.*

[89] *Ibid.; Fair Trade,* Nov. 9, 1888. The statement that only 50 delegates were present is based on *Fair Trade's* testimony. The *Times* stated merely that "at this time the attendance of delegates was small." According to Gladstone, "a mode of proceeding, which appears to have been extremely peculiar, was adopted for the purpose of getting rid of the discussion by shelving the proposal before the mover of it had arrived." *Fair Trade,* Nov. 9, 1888.

[90] *Fair Trade,* Nov. 9, 1888.

tions of policy, while they might be discussed, should not be brought to a vote.[91] Supporters of the motion freely admitted that their intention was to prevent a repetition of the Oxford resolution. But although the majority of delegates seem to have been persuaded that protectionist demonstrations were ill-advised, they nevertheless refused to surrender their privilege to vote upon the whole sphere of policy. At Vincent's suggestion, the proposal to limit the field of voting was referred to the Council, where it apparently died.[92]

As long as the future of the Unionist alliance was uncertain, responsible party members agreed that protection must remain a skeleton in the closet. But the conferences of 1887, 1888, and 1889 left no room for doubt that the skeleton would enjoy the freedom of the house as soon as Liberal Unionists were made to feel more comfortable in the parlor. Cobdenites could well be apprehensive. For their doctrinaire arguments Salisbury had nothing but contempt. With his heart in the laboratory at Hatfield, he recognized no *a priori* formulae, but only "each case on its own merits" and trial and error. Devoted to the affairs of the Foreign Office, he longed for a weapon in the new diplomacy of tariffs. And the rank and file of his party were in revolt. If the conditions of trade did not vastly improve and if the Unionist Alliance were declared either dissolved or indissoluble, it was safe to say that the Conservative Party would soon give its blessing to the protectionist cause.

THE LIFTING OF THE CENSORSHIP: 1890–1892

In the two years before Salisbury's Government fell, that is between 1890 and 1892, the position of the Conservative Party was considerably eased. In November, 1890, the O'Shea divorce led to the disruption of the Gladstone-Parnell alliance and threw Home Rule forces into a state of confusion. One result, as clear as day, was to strengthen Salisbury in his dealings with Liberal Unionists, who, because their votes had been indispensable to defeat Home Rule, had heretofore exercised an influence far out of proportion to their numbers. It was certain, said *Fair Trade* optimistically, "that the disruption of the Gladstone-Parnellite alliance

[91] *Times*, Nov. 27, 1889.

[92] *Ibid.* Future conferences, as will be seen below, registered opinions of government policy in no uncertain terms.

is a prelude to the road being opened to a renewed recognition of our cause." [93] It is interesting to speculate, in this connection, how far Chamberlain might already have traveled along the road which was to lead him to adopt Fair Trade in 1903. There is some evidence that he was at least facing in new directions,[94] and if the evidence is reliable, perhaps it is worth recalling that in December, 1891, Hartington, an undoubted free trader, went to the House of Lords, leaving Chamberlain as Liberal Unionist leader in the Commons.[95] It is certain, in any event, that in 1891 "the breach between the Liberals and the Liberal Unionists widened" [96] and that conversely relations between Chamberlain and Salisbury improved. In November, Chamberlain attended for the first time the annual Conservative Caucus and declared: "Now I neither look for nor desire reunion." [97]

While Conservatives were regaining their freedom of action, the United States struck Britain a staggering blow by the adoption of the McKinley Tariff. The *Times* called it an "act of unfriendliness . . . hardly less decided than the Berlin and Milan decrees of Napoleon." [98] In Sheffield, while the McKinley Bill was pending, numerous meetings of manufacturers and workers demanded retaliation, and the mayor sent a circular letter to all other mayors of the United Kingdom, urging them to act "in order that the public opinion in your neighborhood may be expressed to the Government." [99] "I suppose I shall have a fight on my hands in Brightside," Mundella wrote one of his Leader friends. "Leng [editor of the Sheffield *Telegraph*] is furbishing up the old weapons. . . . It looks to me as if Fair Trade is the horse they declare to win with." [100] Vincent, in his annual address to his constituents, said that although Fair Trade views were distasteful to many, "I will not shrink from them, so long as you give me your confidence, despite the solemn warning of a Cabinet Minister, who recently visited Sheffield, that they would be politically disastrous to me person-

[93] *Fair Trade,* Dec. 5, 1890.
[94] Garvin, *Joseph Chamberlain,* I, 433–35, and II, 468–69.
[95] *Ibid.,* II, 527 ff.
[96] Gardiner, *Sir William Harcourt,* II, 156.
[97] Garvin, *op. cit.,* II, 443.
[98] *Times,* Oct. 13, 1890.
[99] *Fair Trade,* Aug. 1, 1890. See also the account of the great workers' demonstration held in Paradise Square under the auspices of the Sheffield Fair Trade League, *ibid.,* July 18 and 25, 1890.
[100] Mundella MSS, Mundella to J. D. Leader, Aug. 24, 1890.

ally." [101] Similar protests were heard in Bradford and Birmingham, and in Bristol a new Fair Trade monthly called *The Patriot* appeared.[102] When the McKinley Tariff was about to go into effect, the *Times* said "that during the few hours within which commodities can still be imported at the old rates the rush to 'clear' had waxed wildly feverish."[103]

It is not too much to say that the shock caused by the McKinley Tariff did more than ten years of Fair Trade agitation to bring discredit to the Cobdenite school. While protectionists were striking hammer blows for retaliation, Cobdenites seemed to be clouting phantoms. Sir Lyon Playfair told his constituents at Leeds that Americans, who would soon see the folly of their new course, were actually on the eve of adopting free trade.[104] Gladstone confidently predicted that "any injury that is done us will be . . . but the minutest fraction of that which is done by the protecting country to its own population." [105] Events, however, tore the predictions to pieces. Within three months after the McKinley rates went into effect, it was announced that several Sheffield firms had reduced wages by 5 percent.[106] "Cutlery firms engaged in the American trade are working short time," it was said a little later, "and many men are entirely out of work." [107] Lister reported from Bradford that the "McKinley Tariff sent 3,000 Manningham workers into the streets at a blow, and has been the chief factor in the overthrow of the great firm of Saltaire, where possibly 3,000 more operatives will have to face a hungry winter." [108] In Wales hardship spread as a result of the drop in tin-plate exports to America.[109] Vincent complained that "Four well-known English textile firms have moved a whole or a portion of their plant across the Atlantic." [110] Cobdenites did not deny that suffering existed, but their argument that the cause was

[101] Speech of Sept. 1. See *Fair Trade,* Sept. 5, 1890.

[102] To the best of my knowledge no copies are preserved. See *Fair Trade,* June 27, 1890. Also *Times,* Oct. 6, and 7, 1890.

[103] *Times,* Oct. 13, 1890.

[104] *Ibid.,* Nov. 14, 1890.

[105] *Ibid.,* Oct. 30, 1890.

[106] *Ibid.,* Jan. 15, 1891.

[107] *Ibid.,* April 3, 1891: official trade figures for the last quarter of the year showed that cutlery exports to the United States had declined from £50,000 the preceding year, to £22,974.

[108] *Ibid.,* Nov. 1, 1892.

[109] *Fair Trade,* July 3, 1891, estimated that from twenty to twenty-five thousand men had been deprived of employment in Wales. See also Fay, *Great Britain from Adam Smith to the Present Day,* pp. 146–47 and Clapham, *Economic History of Modern Britain,* III, 36.

[110] *Times,* April 26, 1892.

short harvests in Europe and abundant harvests in America began to fall a little flat.[111] What it amounted to, said Vincent, was an invitation to America to "Strike us yet again, heap duty upon duty. . . . we cannot object, we can make no representation, we cannot retaliate." [112] Even the *Times* changed its direction enough to confess that "if Richard Cobden had no more cogent arguments . . . than those which his bannermen are using . . . the economical principles with which his name is associated would have owed but little to his advocacy." [113]

The tide was running fast. As early as July, 1890, Vincent warned Salisbury that "the volume of opinion is fast growing, and in a large proportion of the constituencies the balance of political power lies in the hands of a few resolute men of independent views." [114] Shortly after the McKinley rates went into effect, the Prime Minister was cautiously feeling his way back to arguments for retaliation.

> The conflict which we have to fight is still a conflict of tariffs [he said]. . . . We know that the various nations are looking up their arms, and are seeing with what alterations of tariffs they can meet hostile import duties . . . how they can defend themselves, how they can compel a relaxation of the restrictions which they dread. . . . We have no retaliation to exercise, because we have already reduced our tariffs to the lowest point that the revenue demands will permit us to accept. It is an interesting subject—the consideration for us whether that attitude will or will not be sustainable in the end, or whether the madness of our neighbors will force us to deflect in any degree from the sound and sensible position we adopt.[115]

In June, 1891, when Vincent led a delegation of protectionists to call upon him, Salisbury had moved a little farther. Britain would be ill-advised, he agreed, ever again to enter into most-

111 See for example, Farrer in *Times,* Sept. 17, 1891.

112 *Times,* Oct. 9, 1890. See also Ecroyd's letter, *ibid.,* Oct. 20, 1890.

113 *Times,* July 14, 1890. 114 Vincent to Salisbury, *Fair Trade,* July 25, 1890.

115 *Times,* Nov. 11, 1890. The following March, Salisbury told the Associated Chambers of Commerce that it was futile to remonstrate with protectionist nations as so many deputations urged him to do. "The belief in the effect of a remonstrance is something touching and pathetic, and also slightly infantile. . . . The object of a foreign Power in raising its tariffs is to exclude your commodities, and when you tell them in reproachful tones that the effect of their policy will be to exclude your commodities, the only result is that they say, 'Thank you, that is just what I intended,' and they give another turn to the screw of the tariff . . . and leave you to your reproaches." *Times,* March 5, 1891.

favored-nation treaties which would prevent the Mother Country from offering preferential advantages to her dependencies. As for positive protectionist legislation, he advised them to stir up the country first; for on "organic questions" which

> control the very existence of our Empire and the very foundation of our trade . . . public opinion must be formed before any government can act. . . . It is the duty of those who feel themselves to be the leaders of such a movement and the apostles of such a doctrine to go forth and fight for it, and, when they have convinced the people of this country, their battle will be won.[116]

The apostles did not need to be told twice to go forth and fight for their doctrine. During 1891, protectionist activity—bound up now with the clamor for imperial tariff preference—became ever more feverish. Vincent went to Canada—upon Salisbury's advice, it was rumored—and the Canadian Parliament's address to the Queen asking for repeal of the Belgian and French most-favored-nation treaties soon followed.[117] A great congress of the Chambers of Commerce of the Empire was planned for the following year; the first topic on the agenda called for debate on schemes for commercial federation. In September, the Associated Chambers of Commerce voted to endorse imperial commercial union and welcomed the Empire Congress as a first step in that direction. If it was public opinion that Conservative leaders waited for, it looked as if the time for action had arrived.

The party Conference assembled expectantly at Birmingham in November, 1891. On the first day—perhaps in deference to Chamberlain, who was on the platform with him—Salisbury advised the delegates not to jeopardize unity by bringing up any question that might be "perfectly defensible, but is not a burning question of the moment.[118] The delegates heard him courteously and put their own meaning on his words. "By an overwhelming majority and amid much cheering"—there were, in fact, only six dissentients—the Conference voted to endorse Vincent's program for the "extension of commerce upon a preferential basis throughout all parts of

[116] *Times,* June 20, 1891. [117] See below, pp. 112–14.

[118] *Times,* Nov. 26, 1891. *Fair Trade* warned that "his Lordship is playing a dangerous game—a game which promises to hurl him from office whenever a General Election comes about." *Fair Trade,* Dec. 11, 1891.

the British Empire." What is more, the resolution expressed "the earnest expectation that H. M.'s Government *will see their way clear before the next electoral campaign* to make some decisive declaration of their intention to endeavour to promote mutually-favouring customs arrangements between the colonies and the home country." [119] It was perhaps too much to say, as Harcourt said at Derby,[120] that the rank and file had kicked the Prime Minister downstairs; after all, Salisbury had told Vincent that if he could organize sufficient opinion, the Government would respond. Yet it was undeniable that the party caucus had given the front bench something resembling a mandate for protection, and Salisbury, who knew that the election would not be long in coming, began to make preparations almost at once.

The Prime Minister's course was not easy, but he steered with consummate skill. Remembering the power of the cry "dear loaf," he tried first to avoid it by stating that whatever the strength of agricultural protectionists in his party, he could "hold out no hope of a return" to corn duties.[121] Then, in a memorable speech at Hastings in May, shortly before advising the Queen to dissolve, he nailed his colors to the mast.[122] For the benefit of Liberal Unionists he insisted that the object of his criticism was not the doctrine of free trade, which was still as sound as ever, but rather the "legends and traditions" with which the Cobdenite "Rabbis" had surrounded the original doctrine. Contrary to their predictions, the world had not followed Britain's free-trade example, but had instead almost without exception turned to tariff protection. Under the circumstances, the nation which desired to enjoy free trade with its neighbors had to use the threat of retaliation in order to gain access to their markets.

The Hastings speech was distinctive in that Salisbury no longer put upon protectionists the burden of arousing the country, but stepped forth boldly as the champion of their cause. "If I may aspire to fill the office of a councillor to the public mind," he went on, "I would impress upon you that in this conflict of commercial treaties, to hold your own, you must be prepared, if need be, to inflict upon

[119] Italics mine. *Times*, Nov. 28, 1891.
[120] *Ibid.*, Dec. 4, 1891.
[121] *Ibid.*, Dec. 9, 1891.
[122] *Ibid.*, May 19, 1892.

the nations which injure you the penalty which is in your hands, that of refusing them access to your markets." [123] What were the steps which the "councillor to the public mind" recommended?

> We must confine ourselves, at least for the present, to those subjects on which we should not suffer very much whether the importation continued or diminished. . . . You cannot raise the price of food or raw material, but there is an enormous mass of other articles of importation . . . which are mere matters of luxurious consumption; and if it is a question of wine, or silk, or spirits, or gloves, or lace, or anything of that kind (a voice, "Hops," and cheers)—yes, there is a good deal to be said for hops—but in those cases I should not in the least shrink from diminishing the consumption, and interfering with the comfort of the excellent people who consume these articles of luxury, for the purpose of maintaining our rights in this commercial war. . . . We must distinguish between consumer and consumer, and while jealously preserving the rights of a consumer who is co-extensive . . . with the whole people of the country, we may fairly use our power over an importation which merely ministers to luxury, in order to maintain our own in this great commercial battle.

There was no mistaking it. The hat which Salisbury had thrown into the ring bore a protectionist label, only this time it was not hidden beneath the band. The Liberals—Playfair, Morley, Lord Grey, and Gladstone among them—accepted the challenge, and tried to tear the heart out of the Conservative Government on the grounds that free trade and the "cheap loaf" were in peril.[124] Salisbury made another effort to dissociate the party from advocacy of food duties, but in vain.[125] While the Cobden Club distributed alarmist tracts by Farrer, Playfair, and the other "Rabbis," "the familiar cry of the little loaf was heard throughout the land." [126] When the returns were in, Gladstone had a majority of forty counting the Irish bloc. Britain's Cobdenite policy was safe for yet another little while.

What part fiscal reform played in the election of 1892, it is idle

[123] At this, we are told, the audience broke into "loud and prolonged cheers," and a voice cried: "Common sense at last." "There is a reproach in that interruption," replied Salisbury amid laughter, "but I have never said anything else." *Times,* May 19, 1892. There were 4,300 people present.

[124] *Ibid.,* May 21, 23, 28, and July 8, 1892. [125] *Ibid.,* June 10, 1892.

[126] See Cobden Club's "Annual Report," *Times,* Aug. 8, 1892. See also Lucas, *Lord Glenesk and the Morning Post,* p. 335. Lucas was himself a participant on the Cobdenite side, and in leading articles in Glenesk's (formerly Sir Algernon Borthwick) *Morning Post,* "received immediate and severe castigation." *Ibid.,* p. 335.

to speculate. Buried beneath Home Rule and disestablishment, it perhaps gained a few seats here or lost a few there; but what its total effect actually was or how the British people would have divided had the field been cleared of more compelling issues, it is not in the evidence to decide. Some Cobdenites pretended to believe that the majority of forty represented precisely the margin by which Great Britain had rejected the Tory program of retaliation.[127] Fair Traders gave events quite the opposite meaning. The slenderness of Gladstone's victory in a year when a landslide had been expected, they explained, was due largely to the Tories' bold position on the tariff. Lowther and nearly all advocates of imperial preference had been returned, said Vincent, in many cases with increased majorities.[128]

Amid these conflicting claims, only one thing is certain: the experience of 1892 had not convinced Tories that tariff reform was politically "untouchable." When the party conference assembled in December, the delegates adhered to their custom of endorsing fiscal reform "by a large majority" and stressed "the importance of prompt steps being taken" to put the question before Parliament.[129] The delegates were close to their constituents, and should have known, if anyone knew, approximately what the humor of the voters would allow.

THE DECLINE OF TARIFF REFORM: 1892–1895

After the flood tide of fiscal reform in 1892, the waters began to recede, and at the end of the ensuing three-year Liberal interlude, seemed to have subsided almost entirely. Fair Traders were left high and dry, puzzling for an explanation. Hard times, they had reasoned, would eventually do their work for them—and during Gladstone's premiership the depression in trade was more acute than at any time since 1888. They had fondly expected, too, that the Tories, when freed from the responsibilities of office, would formulate a tariff program to be executed when the Liberals were

127 Cobden Club "Reports," *Times,* Aug. 8, 1892, and July 24, 1893.

128 *Times,* July 25, 1892. Vincent produced a resolution passed by the St. Peter's Conservative Club of Sheffield, acknowledging that "Col. Vincent's return is in great measure due to the hon. member's untiring efforts to obtain for the working classes of our industrial community such protection from foreign competition and prohibitory tariffs as would enable them to enjoy the fruit of their own industry." *Ibid.*

129 *Ibid.,* Dec. 14, 1892.

ousted. But although Vincent did all he could to keep the question alive, neither depression nor the delights of opposition produced the desired result.

How explain the decline? Despite the lack of conclusive evidence, certain suggestions may be hazarded. In the first place, the foundations were being laid for the eventual merger of the Conservative and Liberal Unionist Parties, and doubtless there was pressure on both sides to compromise on controversial issues. By 1895, although they retained separate party machines, the allies were moving under the common term "unionists," and when Salisbury formed his third cabinet in June, the Liberal Unionists accepted office with him. Progress had not been easy. The profound differences separating Chamberlain from certain cliques of the Conservative Party often caused feeling to run high. As late as April, 1895, when there were public recriminations, Chamberlain "resolved either to crush the Conservative mutiny or to leave a 'stupid party' to its unaided devices." [130] Under the circumstances, it is no wonder that Tory leaders desired to push fiscal reform once more into the background. There was no chance, Salisbury told the party caucus of November, 1895, that the Government would adopt

> the romantic dreams of some esteemed friends amongst us. . . . If we look at other countries under other fiscal systems we find the suffering there is hardly inferior to our own. We must not look, therefore, to any violent or revolutionary changes . . . for *if we do anything to disturb violently the relations of men and the confidence with which they deal with each other* we shall aggravate instead of diminish the suffering which we deplore.[131]

In face of this warning, the delegates asked merely for the abrogation of most-favored-nation treaties and prohibition of prison-made imports.[132] A few days later Salisbury explained [133] even more positively that *"the construction of the Government"* ruled out all thought of tariff reform. Only Vincent and a few die-hards remained active. But their opportunities in Parliament were limited, and when they did succeed in arranging a debate, their only front-

[130] Garvin, *Joseph Chamberlain,* II, 629.
[131] *Times,* Nov. 20, 1895. Italics mine.
[132] *Ibid.,* Nov. 20 and 21, 1895.
[133] To a deputation of hop growers. *Ibid.,* Nov. 23, 1895. Italics mine.

bench support came from Lowther, who was obliged to confess that he spoke only for himself.[134]

Secondly, the protectionist movement, though bound up with the relatively easy-going imperialism of the eighties, was paradoxically lost from view in the extravagant and fevered imperialism of the nineties. These were the years when Rhodes and Jameson put vast tracts of Africa under the British flag; when China loomed as an almost limitless export market; and when Britain was hypnotized by the fantastic schemes of Barney Barnato and Whitaker Wright. Against the fascination of Kimberley's diamonds and the lure of the Rand's gold, foreign-trade statistics and debates on imperial preference seemed very prosaic indeed. What was more important, this imperial expansion, by promising *new* markets for British goods, relieved Britain of the necessity (or so it seemed) of forcing an entry into protected markets or of cultivating commerce with the old dominions. Salisbury no longer spoke so much of retaliating against foreign rivals, but he dwelt at length on the need of outflanking them by reaching new markets first.

> If we mean to hold our own against the efforts of all the civilized powers of the world to strangle our commerce by their prohibitive finance we must be prepared to take the requisite measures to open new markets for ourselves among the half-civilized or uncivilized nations of the globe, and we must not be afraid if that effort, which is vital to our industries, should bring with it new responsibilities of empire and government.[135]

Imperial expansion, not imperial preference, now provided the answer to the question "whether our prosperity is to go on, as in the past, increasing, or whether from this moment it is to decline." [136] In 1893 and again in 1895, the Associated Chambers of Commerce, which several years earlier had endorsed Vincent's scheme, defeated motions favoring imperial preference.[137] Even among Federationists, who fought this tendency to neglect the dominions, an increasing number put *Kriegsverein* before *Zollverein,* dismissing tariff preference on the grounds "that we should all get on much faster

[134] *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates,* 4th Ser., Vol. 31, Col. 1210. See also *ibid.,* Vol. 30, Col. 110; Vol. 26, Col. 11; Vol. 10, Col. 1313; Vol. I, Cols. 893 and 1384.

[135] *Times,* May 24, 1895. [136] *Ibid.,* May 24, 1895.

[137] *Chamber of Commerce Journal,* Supplements of April, 1893, and March, 1895.

with the practicable part of Federation if we could cease talking about a point which only leads to dissension and hinders real progress." [138]

The changing character of British imperialism and the preliminary negotiations leading to the creation of a single Unionist Party might thus account, in large measure, for the decline of fiscal reform after 1892. It must not be forgotten, however, that the Liberal program of legislation drained off a great deal of public and party attention. Home Rule not only opened old animosities in the country at large, but occupied the Commons for 85 sittings; 38 days were spent debating Fowler's Parish Councils Bill; and Harcourt's death duties and seemingly endless wrangling with the House of Lords took a severe toll of the remaining time. All of this coincided with events in the United States which encouraged Britain to hope that America would soon abandon the follies of the McKinley Tariff. The election of Cleveland, known in Britain chiefly as a free trader, was hailed by the Cobden Club as "the most noteworthy event of the past twelve months." [139] Although the United States tariff remained highly protectionist, there was some relaxation of duties in 1894; it is perhaps significant that Bradford, in particular, profited by the reductions.[140]

With tariff reform losing ground, many Conservatives who had advocated it now turned to other things. The agitations against prison-made imports, alien immigration, and Government contracts with foreign firms appealed to many; others, particularly farmers, entered the "Bimetallic League"; still others swelled the cry for greater and more efficient aid from consular agents in foreign markets. At the same time the movement for countervailing duties against foreign bounties was losing much of its force. The protectionist movement had, to a very large extent, passed into the hands of farmers; but while protection "all round" might have been politically feasible, protection for agriculture alone was "absolutely out of the bounds of political possibility." [141] Britain set too much store by the "big loaf" to tolerate any such heresy as that.

[138] *Imperial Federation,* Jan., 1893. [139] *Times,* July 24, 1893.
[140] *Ibid.,* May 24, 1895.
[141] The words were Salisbury's. See also his remarks in the House of Lords, *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates,* 3d Ser., Vol. 323, Cols. 829–32.

IV

TARIFF REFORM AND IMPERIALISM 1881-1895

THE WATCHWORDS of the eighties were Ireland and Empire. We have seen in the preceding chapter how the former diverted attention from Fair Trade and brought about political complications most unfavorable to the cause. It is the business of the present chapter to show how the latter transformed Fair Trade from a question of protection to British industry and agriculture to a question involving a major revolution in British imperial policy.

When the Fair Trade League was forming, "Little England" was by no means dead, and "Greater Britain" by no means fully matured. "A colony may exclude our merchandise by its tariffs," complained the *Times* of January 6, 1881; "it may repudiate our influence on its policy, it may assume all the attributes of an independent State, and yet if it falls out with its neighbors it expects us to fight its battles." The *Financial Reform Almanac,* urging England in the best Cobdenite tradition to cut the glory and get on with business, grumbled that while British taxpayers paid for the defense of colonies against native attacks, their only reward was to be met with hostile tariffs against British goods. "If this be persisted in," said the *Almanac,* "the time may come, and soon, when the British people will inquire what benefit they derive from the colonies beyond the questionable one of finding lucrative posts for members of the titled aristocracy." [1]

Yet British pride must have been stirred when the observation was made, again in the *Times,* that although imperial political ties would grow weaker, England must sooner or later become "the historical center of a race that numbers hundreds of millions, speaking our language, reading our books, developing our traditions as

[1] *Financial Reform Almanac* for 1880, p. iii.

new modes of life demand." [2] And some interest must have been awakened when David MacIver argued before the Royal Colonial Society that the weakening of political ties could be averted only by the imposition of imperial preferential tariffs.[3] For those who *were* interested in 1881, there were, in addition to the Colonial Society, the Empire Club, where imperial-minded noblemen and gentlemen were accustomed to gather, and also occasional meetings at the Mansion House, where the Lord Mayor, himself a "colonial merchant of high repute," would urge his listeners to "strive to the utmost to develope this [colonial] trade." [4]

All in all, it would have been difficult for anyone without the toughest of "Manchester minds" to go unmoved by the lusty imperialism that swept through England when the Fair Trade agitation was reaching its height. A decade earlier Thorold Rogers had expressed doubt whether four-fifths of the members sitting in the House of Commons knew "the names of the chief towns in the several British colonies, or could give any but the vaguest answer as to their population, their resources, or their wealth." [5] But in the eighties and nineties, Britain put her nose in a geography book: C. P. Lucas published his *Introduction to an Historical Geography of the British Colonies;* [6] Bartholomew, the cartographer of Edinburgh, enjoyed a national reputation, as anyone familiar with advertisements of the period will know; and the Oxford and Cambridge Schools Examination Board began to place special emphasis on geography.[7] "The subject is being taken up by all examining bodies," said the *Times;* "lecturers upon it are in great demand." [8] Indeed, if you had colonial experience and a hundred attractive magic lantern slides, you stood to make £5 5*s*. for a single illustrated lecture.[9] Later, if your heart was in the right place, you volunteered approximately the same service free of charge.[10] If you were handy with a pen, you could compete for a fifty-pound prize offered by the London Chamber of Commerce for the best essay on imperial

[2] *Times,* June 2, 1881. The *Economist* was moving in the same direction; see the issue of Nov. 5, 1881.

[3] *Morning Post,* June 16, 1881. [4] *Ibid.,* July 18, 1881.

[5] Quoted in an anonymous pamphlet, *The Federation of Canada and Australia with Great Britain and Ireland,* p. 2.

[6] London, 1887. [7] *Times,* Nov. 24, 1887. [8] *Ibid.,* Dec. 30, 1889.

[9] Alfred Morris did. *Fair Trade,* March 28, 1890.

[10] Seeley formed a group of lecturers who did. *Times,* Oct. 13, and Nov. 19, 1894.

federation; [11] a thousand guineas offered by the *Statist* for the best essay on an imperial customs union; [12] or, if you happened to be a Cambridge undergraduate, the Members' Prize for the best Latin essay on imperial federation.[13] If you had not passed British Empire geography, on the other hand, you could not get a job in any capacity at the Colonial Office after 1887. Some feared that since Empire geography was not introduced in elementary schools until the sixth standard, many were not being reached at all; and in the nineties the Reverend Headmaster of Harrow was telling the Royal Colonial Institute how boys could be educated to a sense of their imperial responsibilities.[14] Yet some of those who left school early doubtless had their imperialism served up in volumes such as *Lays of Federation,* which the Fair Trade League retailed for 2*d*.[15]

Meanwhile the course of Empire had brought British rule to Egypt in 1882, Papua in 1884, Bechuanaland and Upper Burma in 1885, Nigeria in 1886, Somaliland and Zululand in 1887, Kenya and Sarawak in 1888, Rhodesia in 1889, Zanzibar in 1890. Scarcely a year passed, it seemed, that somewhere another diamond was not set in the aging Queen's imperial crown. More important, for the tariff-reform movement at any rate, was the attitude of the elder colonies. Instead of claiming independence as Little Englanders had predicted, they were as enthusiastic as young guardsmen in their demonstrations of loyalty. At the Colonial Conference of 1887 it was not a representative of the mother country but Griffith of Queensland and Hofmeyr of South Africa who suggested imperial preferential tariffs; and at Ottawa in 1894 the colonies acted on their own initiative to draw the Empire closer together. In Britain, public opinion pressed constantly for a more affirmative imperial policy. The Imperial Federation League appeared in 1884; in 1886 came the Indian and Colonial Exhibition and the first Congress of Chambers of Commerce of the Empire; in 1887, the first Colonial Conference; in 1891, the formation of Howard Vincent's United Empire Trade League; in 1892 the second Congress of Imperial Chambers of Commerce.

It looked, indeed, as if Greater Britain had come to stay. Im-

[11] *Chamber of Commerce Journal,* April 5, 1886. [12] *Times,* Sept. 26, 1894.
[13] *Fair Trade,* March 13, 1891.
[14] *Journal of the Royal Colonial Institute,* XXVI, 515–39.
[15] *Fair Trade,* July 3, 1891.

perial federation, said the *Times,* on June 18, 1891, "is the great task which lies before the British statesmanship of the future. With the colonies massed around us we can hold our own in the ranks of the world Powers. . . . Without them we must sink to the position of a merely European kingdom—a position which for England entails slow but sure decay." This was a very different tune from that which the *Times* had sung ten years earlier. It was on everybody's lips, and not least on those of Fair Traders.

PROTECTION, FAIR TRADE, AND EMPIRE, 1881–1886

It has been said of the period under review that between Ireland and the Empire there was scarcely time to plant an agitation or room to let one grow.[16] To accommodate the Fair Trade agitation, however, it happened that there was space in the large preserve marked off for Empire.

For, as Ecroyd said in 1879, the patriotic and economic questions were one and indivisible. His first aim, he insisted, was not protection, but

> to consolidate and strengthen the Empire, and so to give all its citizens the sense of belonging to a great nation. . . . England is called to a great work. . . . She has her Empire to reconquer and consolidate,—not by blood and iron, but by a patient, unwearied, resolute, yet peaceful policy, directed to a clear and definite, though perhaps distant end.[17]

The distant end was nothing less than a "Federal Union of all English-speaking communities, which shall give them increased strength and wealth and assurance of peace; and shall enable them to extend to less civilized lands . . . a participation in their own priceless inheritance of freedom and order based upon Christian civilization." [18]

Nor was Ecroyd alone among Fair Traders in his passion for Empire. It must not be forgotten that Sir Alexander Galt, the first Canadian High Commissioner to London, assisted in founding the League; that Sir Frederick Young of the Royal Colonial Institute was on the Executive Committee; that the first distinctively Fair Trade publication was called the *British Empire;* and that the

[16] G. M. Young, in his *Victorian England.*
[17] W. F. Ecroyd, *Policy of Self-Help,* pp. 19–20.
[18] *Ibid.,* p. 25.

League, in its propaganda, displayed a continuing interest in imperial affairs.[19]

The Fair Trade proposals for the Empire were contained in the League's *Manifesto* of 1881. The principal item of preference was to be food; when imported from foreign countries, it was to bear a "moderate duty," when imported from the Empire, no duty at all. The purpose was to transfer all Britain's food-growing to the Empire, where British manufactures would be accepted in return, subject only to revenue duties "probably not equal to one-third of the protective duties levied by the United States, Spain, Russia, etc." In addition, certain luxuries like tobacco, wine, and spirits, already heavily taxed for revenue, should, when imported from the Empire, bear a duty 10 percent lower than when imported from foreign countries. The program was recommended for military as well as commercial reasons. With the consolidation of the United States and the emergence of Germany as a first-rate industrial power, Britain wanted instinctively to draw the Empire closer round her; not only because there was safety in numbers, but because her food supply must not be left in the hands of potentially hostile states. There was reassurance in the estimate that the potential corn-growing lands of Canada surpassed those of Germany, France, Spain, Italy, and European Russia combined; [20] and in the confident belief that Canada, when she had her "mighty fill of population," would put her giant southern neighbor quite in the shade.

Yet as an imperialist movement, Fair Trade was suspect. The League was never quite able to overcome the impression that many of its members were merely stowaways on the good ship Empire because their own protectionist ship had little prospect of making port.

> Protectionists lurk in many places where you would scarcely expect to find them [said Goschen]. Some of them . . . join the Imperial Federationists and wrap themselves round in the folds of the Union Jack.

[19] *Fair Trade,* Feb. 18, and Sept. 16, 1887; May 4, and Sept. 21, 1888; Oct. 24, 1890; Feb. 7, and March 13, 1891. See also G. J. M., *The British Juggernath,* pp. 94–99; Warneford Moffatt, *Land and Work,* pp. 201–3; F. S. Willoughby, *The Depression in Trade;* E. S. Cayley, *Fair Trade and Free Trade,* p. 16.

[20] R. G. Webster, in *Daily Chronicle,* Nov. 23, 1881.

I trust that we may be able to keep separate this question of closer union with the colonies, because I am afraid . . . if it is suspected of too much of the Protectionist taint, it will not have that influence on the masses which we desire.[21]

Certain it is that during the eighties at least, Fair Traders were, as a group, protectionists first and imperialists afterwards. The leading manufacturing members—with the possible exception of Ecroyd—were interested primarily in securing protection for British products in the home market and forcing entry, through the threat of retaliation, in foreign markets. Although the *Manifesto* made it perfectly clear that the proposed preferential duty on food would not be abandoned as a result of reciprocity agreements with foreign states, the suspicion was prevalent that if the United States offered reciprocity, Fair Traders would urge acceptance and tell imperial farmers to go abegging. At the same time the League was embarrassed by the presence of many farmers who urged protection against imperial as well as foreign products. To them it mattered not whether competition came from Minnesota or Manitoba; what they wanted, simply, was a "dear loaf." When *Fair Trade,* calculating the League's political prospects, said that it was only "for the sake of carrying the commercial federation of the Empire" that food duties could be imposed, simon-pure imperialists were entitled to wonder if there were not strangers in their midst. In 1891, when they more fully understood the signs of the times, many Fair Traders tried to change their spots by adopting the name United Empire Trade League. But during the eighties, they were, on the whole, protectionists undisguised.

Fair Traders who came by their imperialist sentiments honestly, as it were, and who desired to emphasize preference before protection or retaliation, carried on their agitation, for the most part, outside and apart from the League. Thus Frederick Young was a leading figure in the Royal Colonial Society; Sir Alexander Galt and various other Canadian Fair Traders were active in the London Chamber of Commerce; while Dunraven, Sir Charles Tupper, Sir John Eardley-Wilmot, and Young again, bored from within the Imperial Federation League. In each case they adopted tactics to meet the situation, and Fair Trade was sometimes watered

[21] *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates,* 3d Ser., Vol. 350, Col. 935.

down, occasionally even lost from view. This was an understandable consequence of their desire to gain the assistance of men such as F. P. de Labilliere and W. E. Forster, who were interested primarily in strengthening the Empire and who conceded, some of them, that England "might find it wise to abandon or modify" free trade, "if by so doing she could promote its adoption throughout the Empire." [22]

Fair Traders' most striking success prior to 1887 was won in the London Chamber of Commerce. Here the conviction was growing in the early eighties that the depression in trade was not transitory, but rather, "that industrial competition with other nations will continue to increase, and that we must, as merchants, resign ourselves to this altered position." [23] "The time when this little kingdom was the absolute mistress of the industrial universe, as she still is of the maritime world, is gone, never, it is feared, to return." [24] Under the circumstances, said the Chamber's *Journal,* "the trade of the future will have to be conducted on new principles. We can no longer wait for markets to reach, unaided, the condition of settled, peaceful, and financially organized states. We shall have to interfere, more actively than in the past, in anticipating these results." [25]

What the *Chamber of Commerce Journal* advocated was "a new colonial movement from which alone a revival of trade can be expected." [26] The movement could assume two forms: either it could aim at repeating in the undeveloped areas of the world what Britain had already accomplished in India, or it could aim at the "concentration and consolidation of our present possessions." The *Journal,* though it did not state an official position, favored the latter: [27] "Continental nations have wilfully acted from their own standpoint without taking our interests into consideration. They must not be surprised if such one-sidedness leads Englishmen to consider what steps they may best adopt for self-protection." [28] The ultimate solution would be to bind the Empire together in some kind of Federation "in order that we may, as merchants, intertrade

22 R. Jebb, *Imperial Architects,* p. 139. The words were Labilliere's; see *ibid.,* p. 143, for Forster's position, which was only slightly different.

23 *Chamber of Commerce Journal,* June 1, 1882.

24 *Ibid.,* Nov. 1, 1882.

25 *Ibid.,* May 5, 1885.

26 *Ibid.,* June 5, 1884.

27 *Ibid.,* May 5, 1884.

28 *Ibid.,* July 4, 1885.

over its whole surface and develope the products of its various soils and climes." [29]

These trends of opinion had great importance in the struggle for imperial unity of the eighties and nineties. In 1886 the London Chamber sponsored the first Congress of Chambers of Commerce of the Empire. The *Journal* predicted that the event would "supply a unique occasion for the delegates to consider, if not to discuss, the possibility of promoting a British *Zollverein* or Commercial Union." [30] The difference between "considering" and "discussing" the question was probably the difference between talking about it privately and talking about it in public. Doubtless, the delegates exchanged tariff views behind the scenes, and possibly they laid foundations for proposals to emerge later. But the political situation in Britain made this moment singularly inauspicious for public examination of the question. Gladstone's free-trade Government was still in office, and Conservatives, taking their Irish case to the hustings, were feeling their way toward an understanding with free-trade Liberal Unionists. One is probably justified in supposing that in some cases, at least, the keen loyalty of the delegates stood in the way of a full discussion of tariff preference.

Most of the speakers, whether deliberately or not, followed the recommendations of the Marquis of Lorne, whose keynote address emphasized the need for patience.[31] The remarks of Sir Saul Samuel, Agent-General for New South Wales, who later by no means held aloof from Fair Trade,[32] were typical. Without expressing approval or disapproval of preferential tariffs, he stressed the difficulty of persuading the mother country to abandon free trade.

I am quite sure [he went on] that every man desires . . . commercial federation if it can be carried out properly. But it is useless and idle to discuss this question unless we face some of the difficulties. . . . If you want to bring about commercial federation, your aim should be to bring about free trade between your colonies and the mother country.

[29] *Chamber of Commerce Journal,* Dec. 1, 1882. It is interesting to note that Canadian influence was strong here. The London Chamber had been founded in 1880 largely as a result of overtures by the Dominion Board of Trade, whose desire was to arrange a conference of Imperial Chambers of Commerce in London; Galt and Tupper were frequently heard at meetings; and in 1885 a special Canadian Trade Section was formed. *Ibid.,* July 5, 1885.

[30] *Ibid.,* July 5, 1886.

[31] Proceedings are in *Ibid.,* Supplement of Aug. 5, 1886.

[32] See, for example, *Times,* March 21, 1894.

W. McMillan of Sydney and Sir F. Dillon Bell, Agent-General for New Zealand, also took their cues from Lorne, and Sir Alexander Galt, who only several days earlier was pleading for imperial preference, filled his speech with cautious generalities. The sole protesting voice was, as might have been expected, Sir Charles Tupper's. The time had come, he said, when the question of imperial unity must be faced, and "when some means must be devised of presenting before the public mind some practical solution of the question." For himself, he was convinced that the answer lay in increased imperial trade, for without the binding ties of mutual interest, imperial loyalty might dissolve into thin air.

When it came to voting, the delegates went no farther in the sphere of commercial policy than to adopt Lorne's motion urging "that the Colonies may be always consulted in reference to any commercial treaty." Far more significant was the resolution, unanimously passed, to send a deputation to wait upon the Prime Minister "requesting that the colonial governments be at once consulted . . . as to the best means of carrying out some efficient scheme of Imperial Federation." Here, possibly, was the germ of the better-known Colonial Conference of 1887.[33]

In the background of these events was the great Indian and Colonial Exhibition of 1886. The Exhibition was not, of course, in any way directly related to the tariff-reform movement; it did, however, emphasize the commercial possibilities of the Empire, and was visited by more than five and a half million people, "at least a proportion of whom must have been impressed by the manifold possibilities of the Queen's dominions." [34]

Upon the closing of the Exhibition, a permanent Imperial Institute was established at the suggestion of the Prince of Wales. The purpose of the Institute was to sponsor discussions and support a museum for the "Arts, Manufactures, and Commerce of the Queen's Colonial and Indian Empire"; and the Prince hoped it "would tend to . . . expand the trade between the different British communities, and to draw closer the bonds which unite the Empire." [35] For the convenience of Empire traders, there was a branch for

[33] Compare J. E. Tyler, *Struggle for Imperial Unity,* pp. 112–14.

[34] *Ibid.,* p. 112.

[35] *Imperial Federation,* Nov., 1886. The proposal was not exactly new. See J. Forbes Watson, *The Imperial Museum;* see also *Imperial Institute Journal,* Jan., 1895.

maps and charts; another for reports and publications; a newsroom where fellows and merchants consulted leading Empire journals; and a Commercial Intelligence Department which gathered commercial information from all parts of the Empire.[36] Although it was not the business of the Institute to agitate or to pass resolutions, in its own way it doubtless played an important role in the movement to stimulate interempire trade.

Of infinitely greater importance than any of these, in the long run, was the Imperial Federation League. Founded in 1884, the League was not, for several years at least, directly related to the movement for tariff reform. Fair Traders were among its members, indeed among its founders; but because the object of the League was to unite men of conflicting views whose only basis of agreement was a vague desire to strengthen imperial bonds, Fair Traders were obliged to keep their controversial fiscal proposals in abeyance.

Some members of the Imperial Federation League were interested primarily in imperial defense, others in trade; some were committed to federation in the strict sense of an imperial parliament; others went no farther than to support a vaguely defined "closer union." Differences were temporarily suppressed because for the time being the paramount need was to popularize the idea of Empire. There was general agreement that events had reached a turning point which must lead toward either disintegration or closer union and that from every standpoint the latter course was desirable.

In the conversations leading to the formation of the League and indeed for several years thereafter, Fair Traders like Lord Dunraven, Sir John Eardley-Wilmot, Sir Frederick Young, Sir Charles Tupper, and Sir John Macdonald worked more or less amicably with such free traders as W. E. Forster, W. H. Smith, G. J. Goschen, and Lord Rosebery. When, at a preliminary meeting, Dunraven spoke guardedly of tariff preference, Forster, the chairman, replied that here was "a matter in which we shall do no good by attempting interference"; but he added, for the benefit of Fair Traders, that any sort of closer imperial union would undoubtedly increase im-

[36] *Imperial Institute Journal*, Jan., 1895; *Times*, Aug. 20, 1888.

perial trade.[37] Later, when a permanent committee was formed, it would seem that extreme care was taken to achieve a balance of conflicting views; Dunraven and Macdonald appeared on one side of the scales, Rosebery and Hicks-Beach on the other. The coöperation of these men doubtless helped to bring imperial questions to an eminence which they had not attained in Britain for many years; but it must be emphasized that the League was, in a very real sense, a provisional organization, and that the truce which brought Cobdenites and Fair Traders together on the basic question of imperial unity could not be long maintained.

Except in the minds of a comparative few, the tariff question and the imperial question were by no means as closely linked before 1887 as they were after. In the Fair Trade League the accent was on *tariffs,* usually undefined; outside the League, it was on *Empire,* usually undefined. When the time came for definitions, however, it was found that the terms could be used almost interchangeably, to the advantage of advocates of both.

PRESSURE FROM THE COLONIES, 1887–1891

Imperial federation, said Salisbury in opening the Colonial Conference of 1887, was still "nebulous matter"; but he predicted that in the course of time it would "cool down and condense into material from which many practical and business-like resolutions may very likely come." It is well to note the date. For after 1887 the condensation proceeded rapidly, and imperial preference emerged from the haze, a thing of shape and substance, inviting study and debate.

What primarily caused the change was, it would seem, the discovery by British Fair Traders and imperialists that colonial opinion on the question of preference had advanced farther than British opinion, and their conviction that if something were not done soon, a matchless opportunity might be forever lost. We have seen how Galt, Tupper, and other Canadians were very early identified with the tariff-reform movement in Britain; and we shall see in the present chapter how they were joined by representatives of the

[37] Reports of the conferences leading to the formation of the League will be found in *Times,* July 26, 30, Nov. 19, Dec. 5, 1884.

Cape and the Australasian Colonies during the eighties and nineties.

Viewing the matter simply, it may be said that there were two reasons why the Colonies were, on the whole, more favorably disposed toward preference than Britain herself. In the first place, with the exception of New South Wales, they were already committed to protectionist policies. This meant that the granting of preference would involve merely an adjustment of existing duties and was not complicated, as in Britain, by the vexing question of protection versus free trade. Secondly, the greater part of the trade of each Colony, unlike that of Great Britain, was carried on *within the Empire.* This meant that measures to stimulate interempire commerce at the expense of foreign commerce would benefit what was already the more profitable portion of the Colonies' trade at the expense of the less profitable. In the mother country, as was frequently pointed out, the effect would have been precisely the reverse, since she did some three-quarters of her trade with foreign nations.

Colonists were persistent in pressing the view that if imperial bonds were to be strengthened, there must be some recognition of common material interests. The effect on the tariff reform and imperialist movements in Britain was profound. British protectionists, while continuing to emphasize the imperial possibilities of their program, became, as *protectionists,* far more outspoken. In the Imperial Federation League, where free traders and protectionists had hitherto worked in harmony, the two groups "began to harden into something very like hostile parties and a period of controversy set in which ended with the disruption of the League." [38]

The great opportunity for the expression of colonial views came at the first Colonial Conference, which gathered in London in 1887. In the preliminary correspondence leading up to the Conference, Sir Samuel Griffith, writing on behalf of Queensland, expressed the hope that there might be some discussion of schemes by which the dominions could offer "each other commercial concessions greater than those which are granted to subjects of other states." And among the subjects recommended for discussion by Cape Colony was "The feasibility of promoting closer union between

[38] Tyler, *op. cit.,* p. 176.

the various parts of the British Empire by means of an Imperial customs tariff, the revenue derived from such tariff to be devoted to the general defence of the Empire." [39]

The Conservative Government, currently at the mercy of free-trade Liberal Unionists, was naturally reluctant to encourage such proposals. Salisbury, in opening the Conference, said it was necessary for the present to "put in the distant and shadowy portion of our task, and not in the practical part of it, any hope of establishing a Customs Union among the various parts of the Empire." It was not, in the nature of things, impossible, he went on, "But the resolutions which were come to in respect to our fiscal policy forty years ago set any such possibility entirely aside, and it cannot now be resumed until on one side or the other very different notions with regard to fiscal policy prevail than at the present moment." As matters stood, he preferred to point the attention of delegates to the "Kriegsverein, which I believe is the real and most important business upon which you will be engaged." [40] Reflecting the determination of the Government in this matter, the Colonial Secretary (Sir Henry Holland) used his powers of discretion to exclude the Queensland and Cape proposals from the formal agenda.[41]

Despite the opposition of Salisbury and Holland, the delegates found three occasions to publicize their views. In the first place, there were the well-known proposals of Sir Samuel Griffith, representing Queensland, and Jan Hofmeyr, representing the Cape. Griffith's argument was the old one that if you wanted to consolidate the Empire you ought to recognize "the principle that Her Majesty's subjects, as such, have a community of material interest as distinguished from the rest of the world." He did not want to "venture into the deep waters of Free Trade and Protection," but merely to observe that while in most matters a distinction was drawn between foreigners and subjects of the Queen, Britain's attachment to Cobdenism made such distinction impossible in the matter of trade. It was conceivable that one day free trade would spread throughout the world. "But in the meantime, while other countries do not recognize that doctrine . . . it is desirable that we should give practical effect to the principles that we hold by

[39] R. Jebb, *The Imperial Conference*, I, 16–17.
[40] *Ibid.*, p. 18.
[41] *Ibid.*, pp. 24–25.

giving material advantages to the people of our own kith and kin." Griffith recommended that each unit of the Empire be left free to decide on what goods and at what rate it would levy customs duties; what was important was that in each case a differential advantage be extended to the mother country and sister Colonies.[42]

Hofmeyr urged that each Colony impose, in addition to its existing customs duties, a further 2 percent tax on articles imported from foreign countries. His main object, apparently, was to provide funds for imperial defense. The amount of foreign goods imported into the Empire in 1885 he estimated at £352,000,000. Thus, at an average rate of 2 percent all round, a fund of roughly £7,000,000 could be produced, enough to "pay for a considerable portion of the British fleet." [43]

Hofmeyr did not overlook, however, the obvious advantage of offering the Colonies "greater fiscal privileges within the Empire than are accorded to foreign powers"; and it was this aspect of the proposal which struck the attention of other delegates. There was no question of their overwhelming support. The Canadians, limited by instructions from their Government, alone were silent; but probably no one doubted that in Canada, of all places, the scheme would be welcomed. The delegates from Newfoundland, Natal, Australia, and New Zealand had nothing but praise. Sir John Downer of South Australia said that self-interest had been the motive of those who brought abut free trade and that self-interest would, in time, cause free trade to be abandoned. Sir William Fitzherbert of New Zealand echoed Griffith's contention that closer trade relations were of paramount importance if the bonds of Empire were to be drawn tighter. James Service of Victoria confessed that while the idea of a common imperial tariff had always struck him as an impossibility, the suggestion that preference might be achieved without a uniform tariff, had awakened "a new set of ideas" in his mind. Service was probably not the only delegate who could report: "I never looked at the matter in that light before, but I have thought about it a good deal since, and I must say it appears to me at present that there is a good deal in that point." Alfred Deakin of Victoria said positively that the

[42] R. Jebb, *The Imperial Conference*, I, pp. 63 ff.; and A. Douglas Graham, *Sir Samuel Walker Griffith*, pp. 67–71.

[43] *Ibid.*, 65 ff.

people of his Colony, "Protectionist and proud of being Protectionist," would agree "with unanimity and enthusiasm to join in carrying out any such proposal." John Robinson of Natal described the scheme as the "only concrete proposal which has been brought before this Conference, dealing directly upon the unification of the Empire," and urged, despite the hesitancy of the British Government, that the Conference "should put forth some definite expression of opinion" in support of it.[44]

The Colonial Secretary, needless to say, felt bound to deflect the discussion from a course which could only embarrass his Government. "I think it was understood that we were not to have resolutions," he reminded the delegates. He acted, he said, out of consideration for Colonial Governments, for whom it might be awkward "if the delegates were to tie themselves to any resolution." But surely nothing could veil the significance of the fact that Hofmeyr's proposals found abundant support among colonial representatives and that only the circumspection of the Home Government prevented a decisive declaration. No doubt many of the delegates returned to their homes feeling, with Alfred Deakin, that while differential duties were eminently desirable, the question was "really for the English people, and not for the Colonies" to decide; and that until a very great change in British opinion came about, "it is almost idle for us to raise the issue." [45]

The question of tariffs emerged again in connection with the bounty problem. Attending the Conference by invitation, Nevile Lubbock, chairman of the West India Committee, presented the familiar case for the sugar interests.[46] He asked the delegates to express their opinion to the British Government that: 1) foreign sugar bounties were injurious to a large colonial industry; 2) justice to colonial industries ought to be one of the main concerns of the British Government; 3) the British Government ought to "spare no effort to bring about the abolition of a system so destructive of sound and healthy competition." Unanimous approval greeted Lubbock's propositions; some delegates, indeed, wanted to go even

[44] *Ibid.*, I, 75 ff.; also Walter Murdoch, *Alfred Deakin*, p. 119.

[45] Jebb, *op. cit.*, I, 76–77.

[46] It was a matter which affected, in addition to the West Indies, Queensland, New South Wales, Fiji—in which Australian capital was heavily invested—Natal, and Mauritius. A similar issue had arisen in Newfoundland, where the French cod-fishery was subsidized with bounties. *Ibid.*, I, 83–90.

farther and recommend countervailing duties.[47] James Service of Victoria, an "avowed Free Trader," charged that the bounty system itself destroyed real free trade.

> Therefore, I say that the proper course for us to take, whether Free Traders, Fair Traders, or Protectionists, is to recognise the fact that we have to defend our industries against this attack. . . . It seems to me that there is no better way . . . than by the imposition of these countervailing duties. . . . I think that foreign countries are now presuming upon what we may almost call the traditional Free Trade policy, as contradistinguished from the intelligent Free Trade policy which gave England a very great start, and which . . . should still be maintained. This traditional Free Trade policy consists of Free Trade phrases improperly applied to circumstances which did not exist at the time the great question was argued out, and to which the arguments . . . would not apply.

The debate was again drifting toward the deep waters of free trade and protection. The Colonial Secretary, after deprecating any resolutions on the subject, asked to be informed "whether the delegates desire to instruct me that they are of opinion that, upon our failing to induce foreign countries to give up their system of bounties, Her Majesty's Government should consider whether we must not put on countervailing duties"; and on this point there was unanimous agreement.

The delegates' third opportunity was presented when Sir Dillon Bell, Agent-General for New Zealand, asked them to discuss the expediency of extending to the Australian Colonies the power already possessed by Canada of negotiating commercial treaties with foreign countries. Behind the suggestion was the desire of the New Zealand Government to offer France reciprocal tariff concessions in return for relaxation of the French duty on frozen meat. The delegates, recognizing in the proposal the very antithesis of imperial preference, were immediately up in arms.

> I venture to hope [said Sir Samuel Griffith] that the French will never have a preference over the British in trade matters, or in any other matters, in New Zealand, or in any other part of the British community. I can perfectly see the apparent immediate advantages to be

[47] Sir Patrick Jennings of New South Wales reported that his Government, though committed to Free Trade, shielded its infant sugar industry from bounties with a duty of £4 to £5 per ton. "I think," he said, "that the strongest Free Trader in the Colony would scarcely attempt to remove that duty." *Ibid.*, I, 85.

gained; but certainly the ultimate result must be that . . . there would be seeds of disunion sown . . . and it would become quite impossible . . . to attempt to bring about any general union of trade interests. So that I hope the New Zealand Government will consider the matter very fully before they press it upon Her Majesty's Government.

Hofmeyr took a similar view, asking the delegates to consider what would have been the result in America if, when the Union was formed, each state had been granted the right to make its own fiscal arrangements and to enter into treaties with foreign governments. The Union, he said, would have entirely gone to pieces, and "If you grant the right, you just as effectively promote disintegration of the British Empire." Deakin added that instead of encouraging trade relations between a Colony and a foreign state, the delegates ought to assert the preferential principle along "the lines suggested by Mr. Hofmeyr, which would draw the Empire and its parts closer together, and not on the lines which would either keep or perhaps force them apart." In view of the apparent unanimity of opinion, Sir Dillon Bell announced that he would withdraw his proposal.[48]

British protectionists, desiring to raise the tariff question above the reach of charges of self-interest, drew great encouragement from the Colonial Conference of 1887. To ask for protection for particular industries was one thing; but to ask for it as a means of binding the Empire together was quite another. The support of colonial delegates had the effect of enlarging and dignifying the issue, of surrounding it, so to speak, with an air of history. Whether recognizing this or not, Fair Traders seized the occasion of the Conference to cultivate what afterwards proved to be extremely useful relations with their colonial friends. The League entertained delegates at a large banquet; [49] the London Chamber of Commerce invited them to one of its meetings; [50] and later, the Manchester branch of the Fair Trade League (which chose, significantly, to be known as the British Union) added the names of Hofmeyr and Sir S. L. Tilley, Lieutenant Governor of New Brunswick, to its list of vice-presidents.[51]

Perhaps even more important than the Colonial Conference,

[48] Jebb, *The Imperial Conference;* I, 82–83.
[49] *Times,* April 29, May 2, and 6, 1887; also *Fair Trade,* May 6, and 20, 1887.
[50] *Times,* May 10, 1887. [51] *Ibid.,* Oct. 18, 1888; *Fair Trade,* Oct. 26, 1888.

in its effect upon the tariff reform movement, at any rate, was the renewed controversy in Canada between those desiring closer economic ties with the United States and those leaning toward imperial preference. The year of the Colonial Conference in London was a year of depression in Canada. "Farmers found the American market barred, the British market flooded, the home market stagnant." Factories which had grown up under Sir John Macdonald's National Policy found, instead of the growing market they had hoped for, a steadily shrinking one. What was needed was a trade outlet; and the old question—whether Canada's salvation lay toward the south, in the market of the United States, or across the seas, in the British market—arose again with great urgency.

Such colonial debates were faithfully reported in the English press, and no doubt many readers were acquainted with the issues. One read, for example, of the Canadian Commercial Union League and its ominous design of bringing about closer trade relations with the United States. It was not entirely clear what the League advocated, but one proposal frequently mentioned was absolute free trade between Canada and the United States, "with a common agreed tariff against the outside world." [52] How this would affect Canada's trade with the mother country apparently did not concern the League in the slightest. Goldwin Smith, one of the villains of the piece, wrote in a letter to the London *Times* that Canada's commercial future lay on her own continent; the alternative, he said, "the commercial unity of the Empire, was abandoned when colonies were allowed to lay protective duties on British goods, and cannot now be restored." [53] Englishmen could take heart, however, in the fact that Smith's program was not without opposition among his own countrymen. Leading the opposition was the Canadian branch of the Imperial Federation League, which in 1887 began to advocate "a Commercial Union of the British Empire as the alternative to the proposition of a commercial union with the United States." [54] Could these loyal Canadians carry the day without the coöperation of the mother country? Some British observers probably pondered this question when they saw, quoted

[52] Tyler, *Struggle for Imperial Unity*, p. 140.
[53] *Times*, Nov. 3, 1887; also Nov. 31, 1887, Feb. 27, 1888, and March 23, 1889.
[54] G. T. Denison, *Struggle for Imperial Unity*, pp. 85, 91–92.

in *Imperial Federation,* in June, 1888, the statement of the Toronto *News* that "on that small but significant word 'trade' the whole question hangs. The colonies do not ask 'Will federation further military schemes, will it help emigration?' but they ask 'Will it assist trade?,' and until it can be shown that it will assist trade . . . the imperial federation idea is a meaningless one to colonists, and especially to Canadians."

The controversy in Canada had an immediate effect on the tariff-reform movement in Britain. A meeting of Birmingham Conservatives resolved, as early as December, 1887, that "the true way in which to avoid losing that advancing Colony [Canada] . . . is to further the movement for Imperial Federation" along commercial lines.[55] One notes too that whereas the resolution adopted at the Conservative Caucus of 1887 was protectionist pure and simple, the resolution proposed in 1888 called pointedly for the stimulation of interempire trade. In the minds of many protectionists like Vincent, who introduced both resolutions, it would seem that the question of tariffs was becoming very closely related to the question of Empire.

At the same time, in the minds of some imperialists like J. A. Froude, for example, the question of Empire was becoming closely related to the question of tariffs. "I could put no faith in any scheme for political federation," wrote Froude, "so long as we gave no material inducements to make them [the Colonies] wish the connexion to continue. . . . It is as sure as the multiplication table that if we do not offer Canada such a union the Americans will, and the Canadian Dominion will be practically lost to us." So strongly did he feel that he became one of the vice-presidents of the Fair Trade League's Manchester branch. He admitted that tariffs would cause a rise in prices, but added: "I believe the maintenance of the Empire of so immense importance to our future position that a slight rise of price in some articles of popular consumption would be as nothing in comparison with the attachment which it would assist in strengthening." [56]

In Canada, the controversy halted temporarily when Parliament

[55] *Imperial Federation,* Dec., 1887.

[56] Froude-W. W. Cadell correspondence, reprinted in *Times,* Oct. 18, 1888, and *Fair Trade,* Oct. 26, 1888.

in 1888 defeated a motion calling for commercial union with the United States. In Britain, however, there was a growing conviction that the time had come when vague talk about imperial federation ought to give way to a consideration of more detailed proposals. In 1889, some members of the Imperial Federation League started to agitate for "the further definition of the aims of the League . . . and for the adoption of more active measures to propagate its views." At about the same time, and with apparently the same object in view, Canadian residents in London began to urge that the Colonies again be consulted on the question of imperial unity. It was hoped, no doubt, that colonial endorsement of tariff preference would serve to tip the scales in the controversy in Britain. Thus, Richard R. Dobell of Quebec, an old advocate of preference, asked the Imperial Federation League to invite colonial branches "to express their views" as to the best means of stimulating imperial trade.[57] When this move failed, Sir Charles Tupper put his more considerable prestige behind a proposal that the Government be urged to "invite a Conference of the representatives of the autonomous Colonies to consider the best means of promoting the unity of the Empire." He added that in his opinion "a feasible policy of mutual preferential trade might be adopted." [58]

The Council of the Imperial Federation League, dominated by free traders, was not prepared to go the whole distance, but it humored Tupper by agreeing to ascertain the Government's reaction. This was a relatively "safe" move, inasmuch as Salisbury's hands were still tied by Liberal Unionists. Probably no one was surprised at his reply that it was not "within the province of Her Majesty's Government" to summon such a conference.

> If the Colonies desire to consult together for this purpose [he went on], they can select representatives to do so without any summons or assistance from us. The intervention of Her Majesty's Government . . . would seem to imply that we were prepared to make recommendations for establishing closer and more substantial union between the Mother Country and the Colonies; or, at least, that we were fully convinced of the possibility of doing so.[59]

[57] *Imperial Federation,* July, 1889.

[58] E. M. Saunders, ed., *Sir Charles Tupper,* II, 132. See also Sir Charles Tupper, *Recollections of Sixty Years,* pp. 248–51.

[59] *Imperial Federation,* Aug., 1889.

Thus was the matter thrown back on the Colonies', and more particularly on Canada's, doorstep. Since the Council had bound itself in advance to be guided by the Prime Minister's opinion, there was nothing left but to fall back on the old milk-and-water policy which the preference group deplored.

Fair Traders in the Imperial Federation League were impatient, however. Immediately upon receipt of Salisbury's reply, Vincent and some of his followers made it known that half measures would no longer suffice. They waited, perhaps, for a more favorable political situation in the mother country and for more assistance from Canada. It was clear, nevertheless, that the uneasy alliance between free traders and Fair Traders in the Imperial Federation League was doomed.

The showdown was brought on by the McKinley Tariff and the Canadian Reciprocity election of 1891. The McKinley "crime" aroused fears on both sides of the water that Americans intended not merely to pull the lion's tail, but perhaps to clip it by outright annexation of Canada. The aim of the United States, Galt wrote Gladstone, was "to create a state of feeling in Canada hostile to the maintenance of the Colonial connection." [60] The American correspondent of the *Times* reported that it would be "difficult to persuade any considerable portion of the people of the United States that the ultimate destiny of Canada can be anything else than absorption by this great Republic." [61] Erastus Wiman, a leader of the Canadian Commercial Union League, had the effrontery to write the *Times* that Canadian loyalists, by asking their countrymen to look to the Mother Country rather than to the United States, were trying to pull asunder "what God has joined together." [62] Naturally, language of this kind kindled strong fires. The majority of Canadians would not be bullied by the "audacious and ambitious foreigner," wrote Vincent, ". . . not even for the shifting markets of their grasping Southern neighbor, nor be coerced by the threat of a prolonged dose of McKinleyism." [63] The judgment of the Canadian Imperial Federation League, widely circulated by Fair Traders in Britain, was that "The Mother Country and our sister Colonies are all seriously affected by the recent legislation at Wash-

[60] O. D. Skelton, *Sir Alexander Galt*, p. 571.
[61] *Times*, Feb. 17, 1891.
[62] *Ibid.*, Feb. 28, 1891.
[63] *Ibid.*, March 3, 1891.

ington, and no time could be more opportune than the present for the Canadian people to urge the importance of some scheme of imperial combination for the advancement of the trade interests of all." [64]

These demonstrations were probably not without effect on British opinion. G. J. Goschen, without surrendering his view that free trade was *economically* sound, began to wonder if it would not be wise "to consider how far this *fiscal* question may be a *political* question in the very widest sense." [65] *Imperial Federation,* hitherto hostile to the idea of a *Zollverein,* published an article entitled "The Hofmeyr Germ" and spoke not unfavorably of Ecroyd.[66] It would be interesting to know how much farther British opinion might have veered from its accustomed path if the Canadian elections of 1891 had gone in favor of the Liberals and if "unrestricted reciprocity" with the United States had become a live possibility. But the victory of Sir John Macdonald and the Conservatives—the victory of the old man, the old flag, and the old country—probably quieted the fears of most Englishmen. *Fair Trade,* calling attention to Macdonald's reduced majority, warned that if Britain did not soon alter her policy, "Canada is practically lost as a part of the Empire." [67] But it was soon clear that Macdonald's victory, decisive if not sweeping, had dealt "unrestricted reciprocity" a blow from which it could not easily recover. "Opinion seems to be almost unanimous in both parties," reported the *Times's* Canadian correspondent, "that the cry for commercial union with America has received its death-blow." [68] By 1893 the Liberals had entirely abandoned the idea; and a few years later they were strongly advocating imperial preference. In view of the consequences, the election of 1891 certainly "was no mere incident in the domestic history of the senior dominion." [69]

Meanwhile, the Canadian branch of the Imperial Federation League had commissioned one of its members, Colonel George

[64] *Fair Trade,* Oct. 24, 1890; *Imperial Federation,* Nov., 1890.

[65] Italics mine. *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates,* 3d Ser., Vol. 350, Cols. 932–40, Feb. 17, 1891. Goschen was apparently willing to consider commercial federation on the basis of free trade within the Empire, but on no other terms.

[66] Tyler, *Struggle for Imperial Unity,* p. 188 and note.

[67] *Fair Trade,* March 13, 1891.

[68] *Times,* May 11, 1891.

[69] Tyler, *op. cit.,* p. 190.

Denison, to spread some enlightenment in the mother country. Denison went to London to "promote the gospel of commercial unity of the Empire," and more specifically to urge the parent League to work for the denunciation of the Belgian and German treaties as a first step toward restoring preferential tariffs.[70] His visit exposed to broad view the spineless character of the London branch. "Here is something to argue about," said the *St. James's Gazette,* "—something to accept or reject or modify. The Canadian Imperial Federationists, at any rate, mean business." [71] When Denison encountered the free traders dominating the League in London, it was certain that *he* meant business. At a stormy meeting of the Executive Committee, after a head-on collision with that arch-Cobdenite, Sir Thomas Farrer, he secured permission to insert in the annual report a clause describing the state of feeling in Canada and promising the League's support of any action taken against the commercial treaties.[72]

What happened when Denison proposed to speak in favor of preference at the annual meeting of the League a week later, is better told in his own words.

> The moment I suggested the idea it was at once objected to; everyone present said it would be impossible. I was persistent and said, "Gentlemen, I have been stopped twice already, but at the annual meeting I certainly have the right to speak." They said that Lord Rosebery would be annoyed. I said, "What difference does that make." ". . . there would be no use in my coming from Canada, learning Lord Rosebery's views, and then repeating them.". . . They then said "that it would be unpleasant for me, that the meeting would express disapproval." I said, "The more reason they should hear my views," finally saying, "Gentlemen, if I cannot deliver the message I have undertaken to deliver I shall not speak at all, and will report the whole circumstance to the League in Canada, and let them know that we are not allowed to express our views." This they would not hear of, and agreed that I could say what I liked.[73]

The lessons of Denison's visit, of the Colonial Conference of 1887, and of the Canadian reciprocity debates were not lost on protectionists and imperialists in Britain. It was plain that by joining forces and making the questions of imperial unity and trade

[70] Denison, *op. cit.,* p. 139. [71] *St. James's Gazette,* Feb. 4, 1890.
[72] Denison, *Struggle for Imperial Unity,* pp. 140–42. [73] *Ibid.,* pp. 142–43.

one and indivisible, they could gain valuable support from the Colonies. And early in 1891 some, at least, began to practice what they had learned.

THE UNITED EMPIRE TRADE LEAGUE

The British answer to the colonial agitation was the formation of the United Empire Trade League in February and March, 1891. The founders of the League said that colonial enthusiasm could not long be sustained unless some "practical scheme" was presented by the mother country. Soon it might be too late. It was their intention to draw together all the elements of British opinion favoring the use of tariffs to serve imperial interests; to encourage Colonists not to abandon the cause; and at the same time to formulate a practical scheme upon which all could unite.[74] The elements of British opinion favoring tariffs were to be found in the Fair Trade League and the old Imperial Federation League. Although a few individuals belonged to both, the two organizations had remained apart; because in one, protection, on the whole, was put before Empire; and in the other, Empire, on the whole, was put before protection. In view of the pressure exerted by the Colonies, it was now recognized by some members of both organizations that there was a rather complete identity of interests. The form in which imperial unity was most likely to find acceptance in the Colonies would appear to be preferential tariffs; the form in which protection was most likely to find acceptance in Britain was imperial unity. It was easy to conclude that a single organization was needed to advocate both.

Before definite steps were taken, a final attempt was made to convert the Imperial Federation League. In the Executive Committee of the League Vincent moved that a deputation be sent to the Prime Minister to urge "a thorough inquiry by Imperial Conference or Royal Commission into the possibility of establishing a Commercial Federation within the Empire." Only three members favored the motion. The majority, said the League's journal, were "entirely against narrowing the scope of the Conference . . . in

[74] *Manifesto,* reprinted in *Imperial Federation,* May, 1891.

the way proposed by Mr. Vincent. The League has never endorsed, and is very unlikely to endorse such a motion." [75]

On February 13, 1891, a meeting in Howard Vincent's home was attended by several leaders of colonial opinion, Members of Parliament, and representatives of some eleven associations.[76] This was the beginning of the United Empire Trade League, the broad purposes of which were announced by Vincent in a letter to the *Times*. The aim of the League was to unite "on a broad, popular, and patriotic foundation all societies and persons, in the United Kingdom and throughout the Empire, interested in the extension of British trade, the security of British capital, and the prosperity of British labour." There were two objects, the pursuit of which could be carried on quite independently of parties: "a) The furtherance of mutually advantageous trading relations amongst all who share allegiance to the Queen; b) the advancement of the interests of British industry and commerce throughout the world." [77]

It is worth noting the effort made in wording the announcement to appeal to the Englishman's sense of business as well as his sense of Empire. The same was apparent in the *Manifesto* which appeared a little later.[78] "The United Empire Trade League affirms that the British Empire was established by the British for the British," so the *Manifesto* ran. "The whole object of Empire is Commerce and the extension of commercial relations. It is with this view that India was subjugated, that North America and the West Indies were acquired, that Australasia and South Africa were settled." The reader was reminded that in 1845 goods from the Empire had received a preferential advantage of 50 percent. The first task of the League must be to secure denunciation of the commercial treaties which were the only legal obstacle to restoring that system. Of the colonial statesmen favoring such a policy, Dalley, Service, Griffith, Galt, Vogel, Rhodes, Hofmeyr, Tupper, Thompson, and Sprigg were listed. The *Manifesto* added that "The imposition of any arrangement which might be distasteful to the free

[75] *Imperial Federation,* March, 1891.

[76] *Times,* Feb. 14, 1891, and *Fair Trade,* Feb. 20, 1891.

[77] *Times,* March 3, 1891. The League was to be under the control of "a general council, representing home and colonial industries."

[78] *Imperial Federation,* May, 1891.

people of any single colony is not suggested." Nor, naturally, was "the slightest increase in the cost of food, or the taxation of raw materials in any way advocated."

It did not require close analysis to observe that the United Empire Trade League was coming dangerously close to the same contradictions which had embarrassed the Fair Trade League. There was, to be sure, a decided emphasis upon Empire, which tended to obscure inner antagonisms; but there was probably more than a little justification for Sir Lyon Playfair's charge that the "dark horse" of the United Empire Trade League was protection for English corn and cattle and better rents for English landlords.[79] The new League disclaimed any desire for a rise in prices, but it nevertheless advocated tariffs; and while its propaganda did not stress reciprocity with foreign nations, it was not easy to see by what other means it intended to expand British commerce "throughout the world." It is worth noting, too, that shortly after Vincent launched the new organization, the Fair Trade League was dissolved, and a good many hardshelled protectionists joined the United Empire Trade League. Among them were James Lowther and J. Rankin, both familiar advocates of protection in the Associated Chambers of Agriculture; and A. Staveley Hill, P. A. Muntz and Knatchbull-Huggessen, who, along with Lowther, had frequently raised the tariff question in the House of Commons.

At the same time, it would not do to overlook the enormous advantage which the new League gained by taking care to move with the imperialist wind at its back. The *St. James's Gazette* and the *Globe* both took the view, still fairly novel in England, that though the United Empire Trade League's proposals would involve a rise in prices, "the gain to the Empire at large would be well worth the sacrifice."[80] A year later the *Times,* that slowly crumbling Cobdenite fortress, said: "It is certain that for the consumer generally absolute free trade is the best, but it is not certain that the interest of the consumer, as such, is the only thing to be considered."[81] If some members of the new League were suspected of looking after their own interests, these were probably counter-

[79] Tyler, *op. cit.,* p. 194. [80] Quoted in *Imperial Federation,* Sept., 1891.

[81] The leading article went on: "When nations like the United States, Russia, and France are strengthening their exclusive systems against us . . . it is not pleasant to contemplate the possibility that . . . our colonial trade may slip from us and the

balanced in the eyes of many by the presence of numerous prominent Colonists who certainly had no interest in British manufacturing or agriculture as such. At the end of its first year, the United Empire Trade League boasted among its vice-presidents the premiers of Cape Colony, Queensland, and Newfoundland; and in its council were 300 imperial M.P.'s.[82] It was a list to make the head swim; by contrast, the Fair Trade League was as dry as dust.

The agitation undertaken by the United Empire Trade League was varied and vigorous. During the first year many public meetings were held; 100,000 pamphlets, atlases, and commercial diagrams were distributed; and the membership grew to 5,120.[83] In June a deputation from the League waited upon Salisbury, whose utterances were now somewhat less restricted by the requirements of the Liberal Unionists alliance. Speaking of those "very unfortunate pledges" contained in the German and Belgian treaties, the Prime Minister said: "I can give you with the greatest confidence, I think, the assurance that not only will not this Government, but any future Government, ever be disposed to enter into any such engagements again." He would not promise to denounce them, for the treaties as a whole conferred many benefits on British trade; and "you cannot denounce a treaty by bits." The date for renewal was not distant, however, and he had "no doubt that before a very long time has elapsed some means of mitigating this evil may be found." As for tariff legislation, his advice was that they arouse the electorate and present the Government with a mandate.[84]

There was some evidence that during 1891 the electorate was beginning to be aroused. The annual conference of British Chambers of Commerce in September unanimously approved a vague resolution urging measures to secure "closer commercial union between the mother country and the colonies." [85] In November, the Conservative Party conference, after several years of silence, passed a resolution standing in Vincent's name advocating the "extension of commerce upon a preferential basis throughout all parts of the British Empire." And all this while Vincent, Dunraven, and

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political allegiance of our colonial fellow-subjects may be gradually broken down." *Times,* April 27, 1892.

[82] First Annual Report, *Times,* April 23, 1892. [83] *Ibid.*

[84] *Times,* June 20, 1891; and *Fair Trade,* June 26, 1891.

[85] Fuchs, *Trade Policy of Great Britain and Her Colonies,* 366–77.

Lowther were keeping the question alive in Parliament.[86] The following May, when Salisbury made his great speech at Hastings, his accent was, to be sure, on retaliation. But surely no one had the illusion that the United Empire Trade League *opposed* retaliation. And it was noted that the Prime Minister had specifically mentioned wines and spirits, on which preference *could* be granted to Australia and the Cape.

Meanwhile, in a whirlwind tour across Canada, Vincent had scored his most spectacular triumph. Meetings in Toronto, Montreal, Ottawa, St. John, Halifax, Hamilton, Winnipeg, Regina, Calgary, and Vancouver all passed resolutions approving the principles of the United Empire Trade League and urging the abrogation of the treaties which stood in the way.[87] Vincent was well suited to his task, having traveled widely in the Empire and behaving usually rather more like a colonial than a British politician. It was soon reported that 105 members of the new Canadian Parliament, nearly half, had endorsed his program. The *Times* colonial correspondent observed that there was a "fair chance of a working majority if any practical question connected with the subject should arise." [88] Vincent himself was enchanted. Throughout Canada, he wrote a friend at home,

> We have met with eager and unanimous support. It is perfectly clear that everything rests with the people of England. The idea is so universal that they are so wedded to free imports, that it is of no use for the colonies to approach them upon closer trade relations. I tell them that this is true of the professors but not of the lads in Yorkshire. This is the center of the most glorious wheat country imaginable, and yet but a 100th part occupied. Here is the granary of England on the Western Continent.[89]

Upon several occasions, in his enthusiasm, Vincent made statements, later retracted, indicating that Britain was closer to abandoning free trade than was actually the case. This gave critics on both sides of the water their opportunity. The Montreal *Herald* remarked that Canada would better beware of Vincent's "fad," because there was not "a single public man of recognized ability and

[86] *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates,* 3d Ser., Vol. 350, Cols. 908–44; see also Tyler, *op. cit.,* p. 195.

[87] *Times,* July 30, 1891, and Sept. 25, 1891.

[88] *Ibid.,* Aug. 5, 1891.

[89] Quoted in *ibid.,* Sept. 25, 1891.

influence in the national councils of Great Britain who would seriously advocate the adoption of such a policy." [90]

But though Vincent confessed that he held no warrant from the British Government, there is some reason to speculate whether party leaders were not more interested in his journey than they cared to admit. A British M.P., probably Louis Jennings, wrote in the New York *Herald* that

> Some members of Parliament are bringing pressure to bear upon Lord Salisbury to carry out a commercial reciprocity policy for England. It is admitted that the work must be begun with the English colonies, and communications with Canada, Australia, and New Zealand have been privately going on for some time past for the formation of an Imperial *Zollverein*.[91]

W. H. Smith, Conservative leader in the House of Commons, was communicating guardedly with the Canadian Government on the subject of preference; and Salisbury had practically invited Vincent to force the Government's hand by arousing popular opinion. While Vincent was in Canada, both houses at Ottawa adopted an address to the Queen, asking for the denunciation of the German and Belgian treaties.[92] It was said that Vincent had influenced Canadian statesmen to send the address, and rumor had it that Salisbury's views had been consulted.[93] It is certainly not fantastic to suggest that, in regard to the address to the throne and Vincent's part in it, if any, there was strong likelihood that the Government's consent had been secured in advance.

After communicating some of his enthusiasm to Canada, Vincent tried to communicate some of Canada's enthusiasm to Britain. Not a little was lost in the exchange, naturally, but a triumphant homecoming among his Sheffield constituents added to the impression of a swelling public opinion. At a welcome rally in Montgomery Hall, Sheffield, he reported that Canada was now ready for commercial federation and appealed to Britain to meet the dominion halfway.[94] He later carried the same message to the Sheffield

[90] Quoted in *Imperial Federation,* Oct., 1891.

[91] Quoted in *ibid.,* Aug., 1891. The name of the author is not given, but it is said that he is a British M.P. It was very likely Jennings, for he was an M.P. and represented the *Herald* in London. *Times,* Feb. 10, 1893.

[92] Fuchs, *op. cit.,* 363–65. [93] *Fair Trade,* Dec. 18, 1891; *Times,* Sept. 28, 1891.

[94] Sheffield *Daily Telegraph,* Jan. 12, 1892.

Chamber of Commerce [95] and to a public meeting in Manchester, where Lowther and Lister (now Lord Masham) appeared on the platform with him.[96] Less than three months later, the Canadian House of Commons, going a step farther than the address to the throne of 1891, resolved, by a majority of 98 to 64, that if Britain gave a preferential advantage to Canadian products, a substantial reduction of duties on British products would be granted in return.[97] Whether Vincent was in any way responsible for this proposal, it is impossible to say. But the cumulative effect of his agitation and the Canadian offer was to give added weight to the argument for imperial preference. As the *Times* put it, if the other Colonies were prepared to match the Canadian offer, there would be a strong body of opinion in Britain which would urge acceptance even at the cost of raising prices.[98]

Soon, however, Vincent's plans crumbled like a house of cards. The second Congress of Chambers of Commerce of the Empire, meeting in 1892, was clearly not an adequate test of either British or Colonial opinion, but it was the nearest thing to a test that the times afforded; and the rejection of imperial preference by the Congress was disastrous.

Vincent and his followers had hopes that endorsement of imperial preference by colonial delegates would have a decisive influence. Fair Traders had long been urging the Government to summon a second colonial conference to encourage growth of the seeds planted by Hofmeyr and Griffith in 1887. The Congress of Imperial Chambers, a "true Parliament of British Commerce," [99] so-called, would, it was probably hoped, have the same effect. Before the Congress opened, colonial delegates were entertained at a United Empire Trade League banquet, where Vincent and Lowther expounded the League program and emphasized the Empire's potential independence of foreign nations.[100]

The London Chamber of Commerce, on whose initiative the Congress was called, had of late been giving serious thought to the question of commercial federation. Although no official position had been adopted, the Chamber's *Journal* frequently urged,

[95] Sheffield *Daily Telegraph*, Jan. 21, 1892.
[96] *Ibid.*, Feb. 3, 1892.
[97] Tyler, *Struggle for Imperial Unity*, pp. 195–96.
[98] *Times*, April 27, 1892.
[99] Sir John Lubbock, *Chamber of Commerce Journal*, Supplement, July 14, 1892.
[100] *Times*, June 24, 1892.

as a remedy for Britain's commercial difficulties, "a more aggressive policy in the shape of a British Trade Federation, with which the other nations of the world would be compelled to treat." [101] Now, on the agenda for the Congress, the first subject for debate was "Commercial Relations of the Mother Country with her Colonies and Possessions, with special regard to the renewal of European Treaties, and recent commercial legislation in the United States." [102] A preliminary circular asked each chamber to "formulate its views in a distinct shape on this question, in a resolution or other such form as it may deem expedient" and to select "a delegate or delegates who will be prepared to support the proposal at the sitting of the Congress." [103] The circular was issued almost a year in advance of the actual meeting; the chambers may thus be assumed to have had all the time needed for careful deliberation.

The principal issue on which the delegates to the Congress divided was not, of course, whether interempire trade ought to be encouraged, but whether, in order to achieve this end, the mother country would abandon free trade for differential duties, or the Colonies abandon protection for imperial free trade.[104] Thus G. W. Medley, a leader of the Cobden Club, secured adoption of a motion stating that "preferential duties, being based on Protection, would be politically dangerous, and economically disastrous; and that the arrangement which, more than any other, would conduce to an intimate commercial union, would be by our self-governing Colonies adopting, as closely as circumstances will permit, the non-protective policy of the Mother Country." The opposing view was expressed in Sir Charles Tupper's rejected amendment:

> *Resolved:*—That in order to extend the exchange and consumption of the home staple products in every part of the British Empire, a slight differential duty should be adopted by the Imperial and Colonial Governments in favour of home productions against the imported foreign articles.

An analysis of the voting reveals that 19 out of 22 Canadian Chambers supported Tupper's amendment; of the remaining colonial Chambers, 7 were for, 17 against; while the British opposed

101 *Chamber of Commerce Journal,* May 10, 1892. 102 *Ibid.,* July 10, 1891.
103 *Ibid.,* July 10, 1891. 104 Proceedings appear in *ibid.,* July 14, 1892.

him, 35 to 7. The net result was the defeat of Tupper's amendment, 55 chambers to 33, and the adoption of Medley's original free-trade motion, 47 to 34. It is worth adding that, again as at the first Congress in 1886, some of the colonial delegates—James Huddart of Melbourne, for example—opposed Tupper not because they differed with him in principle, but rather because they recognized that there was little hope of persuading the British to depart from the traditional policy of free trade.

It would appear that Medley and Tupper had come very close to stating the fundamental difference of opinion which made commercial federation of the Empire, for the time being at any rate, a virtual impossibility. There was, among tariff reformers in Britain, altogether too little understanding of the meaning of the "National Policy" of protective tariffs to which Canada had turned in 1879. Not a few Fair Traders seemed to imply in their arguments that it would be possible to return to the essentials of the old colonial system, under which, before repeal of the Corn Laws, colonial food and raw materials had been exchanged for manufactures from Britain.

The situation was no longer so simple, however. The Colonies were no longer willing to play "the role of granary to industrialized Britain." [105] As Dilke pointed out in 1890, they were determined to build up their own industries, which lived in particular dread of British and Indian competitors.[106] This was most clearly the case in Canada, of course, but, to a lesser degree, the same was true of other parts of the Empire. J. X. Merriman of South Africa wrote in 1887 that "Canada and New Zealand, to say nothing of Victoria, mean to secure their own markets and to compete in others, and with cheap material, cheap food, and cheap land, who shall say them nay?" [107] Five years later the view was expressed by the Grahamstown *Journal,* in Merriman's own Colony, that "we are . . . bound to . . . give some protection to our young colonial manufactures." [108]

Not less important as an obstacle to commercial federation on the basis of free trade within the Empire was the undoubted colo-

[105] Tyler, *op. cit.,* p. 34.
[106] *Ibid.,* p. 167; Dilke, *Problems of Greater Britain,* II, 475.
[107] *Nineteenth Century,* April, 1887, quoted in Tyler, *op. cit.,* p. 171.
[108] Tyler, *op. cit.,* p. 171 note.

nial dependence upon tariffs for the major part of revenue needs. It was estimated that, in the Colonies, customs revenue "ranged at between 60 per cent and 90 per cent of the gross taxation." [109] Inasmuch as the greater portion of colonial imports came not from foreign countries but from the Empire itself, adoption of imperial free trade or possibly even differential duties would have necessitated serious fiscal readjustments. It probably would have meant increased dependence upon direct taxation, to which there would doubtless have been strong opposition.

It is far from certain, of course, that the idea of a free-trading Empire protected from foreign competition would have carried the day even in the mother country, although a strong body of opinion would unquestionably have favored it. Nevile Lubbock attempted to sound out the Congress of Chambers of Commerce on this head; had he succeeded, the reaction of the British chambers would have been very interesting indeed. But Tupper managed to deprive Lubbock's resolution of any meaning by changing the words *"free* trade within the British Empire" to *"freer* trade within the British Empire." [110] Whatever the feeling of the British delegates, this maneuver by one of the leading Canadian advocates of preference was significant. It underlined the fact that the form of commercial federation which stood the best chance of acceptance in Britain was precisely the form which Canada was most likely to reject.

The alternative to commercial federation on the basis of free trade was a system of imperial preference in which the Colonies would be left free to put "eleven foot tariffs on foreign goods and ten foot tariffs on the goods of the mother country," [111] while Great Britain would be required to enact a tariff at least sufficient to allow the Colonies a differential advantage. As the debates at the Congress of Chambers of Commerce brought out, British opposition to such a one-sided scheme was not less formidable than Canadian opposition to imperial free trade. It was said, and repeated time and again, that the mother country, by her policy of free trade, already gave the greatest possible advantage to imports

[109] *Ibid.*, p. 168. [110] *Chamber of Commerce Journal,* Supplement, July 14, 1892.
[111] Paraphrased from Goschen's remarks. See *Hansard's Parliamentary Debates,* 3d Ser., Vol. 350, Cols. 932–40, Feb. 17, 1891.

from *all* countries, including the Colonies. Since 75 percent of these imports originated outside the Empire, differential duties would mean, in effect, penalizing three-quarters of Britain's trade for the sake of encouraging one-quarter—and the one-quarter would still face substantial protective barriers in the Colonies. Canada had made a "tempting offer" to give the mother country a preferential advantage, said Lord Brassey, "but such an undertaking would be of no practical advantage if the barrier raised against us, albeit lower than that reared up against the foreigner, would still be so high that we could not leap over it." [112] There, for the time being, the matter lay. The grounds of disagreement had been clearly stated on both sides, and there was no apparent prospect of compromise.

In the same month that the Congress of Chambers of Commerce of the Empire held its final sitting, the Liberals scored their victory of 1892, and in August Salisbury resigned. The Liberals were to learn, to the surprise of only a few, that the driving force of imperialism could not be turned back. But the imperialism of the Liberal interlude was, as we have seen, Kipling's rather more than Ecroyd's or Vincent's; and for three years, at least, all hope of realizing the program of the United Empire Trade League vanished into thin air.

PRESSURE FROM THE COLONIES, 1892–1895

While Vincent and the British tariff reformers were licking their wounds after the defeats of 1892, leadership of the movement, even in London itself, passed again into the hands of Colonials. Concerted action in behalf of imperial trade by the Colonies, or at least by their representatives in London, was not entirely new. In 1890, Sir Charles Tupper and the Agents-General of seven Colo-

[112] *Chamber of Commerce Journal,* Supplement, July 14, 1892. This was, of course, an old Cobdenite argument; but it was no longer stated in the rigorous terms which had infuriated Fair Traders. Brassey admitted that while Britain prospered under free trade, the United States was no less prosperous under protection, and he drew "the inference that the arguments used in favour of free trade are not quite so conclusive as the staunch supporters of its doctrine assert." His explanation was that "the sources of prosperity in the two countries are totally different." England depended on the export of manufactured articles; the United States on a huge internal trade and vast exports of food and raw materials. Each had to cut her fiscal system to suit her needs. "Our crowded population could not live," said Brassey, "if they failed to hold their own as exporters and manufacturers."

nies had petitioned the Colonial Secretary to help bring about the termination of the Belgian and German commercial treaties.[113] What was distinctive about efforts of this kind after 1892 was that they were directed not so much toward influencing the policy of the mother country, but toward enabling the Colonies to take steps, independent of the mother country, for encouraging trade among themselves. As early as February 16, 1891, the *Times's* colonial correspondent, discussing the aims of the Conservative Party in Canada, reported that "the notion begins to gain ground that groups of colonies, even when not federated, might . . . enter into preferential customs agreements with each other, on the same principle as that embodied in Mr. Hofmeyr's scheme for the Empire." It was hoped, as will be seen, that if the Colonies could prove, by their own experience, the practicability of preferential tariffs, the mother country would eventually be persuaded to join.

Not that Great Britain was given up as lost—far from it. Late in 1892, the Canadian M.P. who had introduced the motion offering the mother country reciprocal preference, was in England urging public meetings to endorse his policy. He was accompanied by George Foster, later to play a conspicuous part in the movement.[114] When the Imperial Federation League was disbanded in London,[115] the Canadian branch, which had not been consulted, objected strenuously. Colonel George Denison charged that the dissolution had been engineered by opponents of preference who feared that the idea had gained sufficient strength to dominate the federation movement. Possibly because of the annoyance of the Canadians, steps were soon taken in London to revive the organization, but the tariff question immediately raised its ugly head. Should commercial union be based on free trade within the Empire or merely freer trade, as the Canadians advocated? After Denison had again visited London, a committee was appointed to work out a compromise arrangement.[116] Abandoning precise definitions, the new League bound itself only "to consider how far it may be possible to modify any laws or treaties which impede freedom of

[113] E. M. Saunders, ed., *Sir Charles Tupper,* II, 142–43; also Jacques le Monnier, *La Politique des tarifs préférentiels,* pp. 22–23.

[114] *Imperial Federation,* Jan., 1893. [115] Tyler, *op. cit.,* Chapter XVII.

[116] Denison to Sir John Lubbock, quoted in *Times,* June 14, 1894; letter dated May 29, 1894. *Times,* July 27, 1894.

action in the making of reciprocal trade arrangements between the United Kingdom and the Colonies, or between any two or more British Colonies or possessions." [117] Thus the Imperial Federation League was revived under the name of the British Empire League.[118] The Canadian branch at once began to urge their Government to grant a preference on British goods without waiting for the mother country to act. This was the policy adopted by the Laurier Government in 1897. Meanwhile, in the Canadian tariff of 1894, though duties remained high, the substitution of ad valorem for specific duties and slight reductions on textiles, hardware, and manufactured iron and steel gave some benefit to British products.[119]

In the meantime, South Africa had added her voice to that of Canada. When Cecil Rhodes, who was one of the United Empire Trade League's vice-presidents, visited England in the early nineties, it was reported that he had stood up for "the scheme of Mr. Hofmeyr as a working platform" of imperial unity and that he had urged consideration of the plan on Lord Salisbury.[120] Rhodes was apparently disappointed with the reception given the scheme in Britain, for he soon was soliciting the support of statesmen in other parts of the Empire. His letter to Sir John Macdonald, after Canada's Reciprocity Election of 1891, may be quoted in full: [121]

8 May 1891

DEAR SIR:—I wish to write and congratulate you on winning the elections in Canada. I read your manifesto and I could understand the issue. If I might express a wish it would be that we could meet before stern fate claims us. I might write pages, but I feel I know you and your politics as if we had been friends for years. The whole thing lies in the question: Can we invent some tie with our mother-country that will prevent separation? It must be a practical one, for future generations will not be born in England. The curse is that English politicians cannot see the

[117] Denison, *op. cit.*, p. 208. The Canadians agreed to this course on the understanding that they would have the right, as an independent branch, to advocate tariff changes.

[118] Arrangements had been completed by July, 1894. The Duke of Devonshire was president. *Times,* July 27, 1894.

[119] This was the tariff of March, 1894. A summary appeared in *Times,* Jan. 4, 1895. See also *Times,* April 16, 1894.

[120] *Times,* March 6 and 16, 1891. The Report, appearing in a special article by an unknown correspondent, set off a bombardment of letters to the *Times,* including one from Sir. T. H. Farrer, *Times,* March 10, 1891.

[121] Sir Lewis Michell, *Rhodes,* II, 29–30.

future. They think they will always be the manufacturing mart of the world, but do not understand what protection coupled with reciprocal relations means. I have taken the liberty of writing to you, and if you honor me with an answer I will write you again.

Yours,

C. J. RHODES

P. S. You might not know who I am, so I will say I am the Prime Minister of this Colony—that is, the Cape Colony.

At about the same time, Rhodes wrote in a similar vein to Sir Henry Parkes, Premier of New South Wales.[122]

I recognize [he said] that in the future, if we are to remain a part of the British Empire, which is my present hope, we must receive special consideration from the Mother Country. I do not know whether you have considered the question of preferential consideration as to our products, but I believe that if we were united in our views we would obtain such a consideration.

Two years later, after the conquest of Matabeleland, Rhodes approached the mother country with a memorandum suggesting the inclusion in the charter of the new territories the proviso that tariffs on British goods, if levied at all, should not exceed the duties of the South African Customs Union.[123] But Lord Ripon, Liberal Colonial Secretary, suspected that the memorandum contained the entering wedge of preference. He suggested, probably to the utter mystification of Rhodes, that the words "imported goods" be substituted for "British goods." The fiscal policy which Rhodes advocated, added Ripon, was "not the one which has commended itself for the last half century to the large majority of the people of this country"; the British Government could not permit such a momentous change to be carried out "indirectly, and as it were by a side wind, in a document of the nature of the memorandum." [124]

Replying in the Cape Assembly, Rhodes did not try to soften his blows.

They have been talking in England [he said] about three acres and a cow, about liquor legislation, and about the question of local government for Ireland. They spend their whole time in these matters, but

[122] The letter was communicated to the *Times* by Dr. Jameson in Sept., 1903, and was reprinted in the *Journal of the Royal Colonial Institute,* XXV, 81–82.

[123] See *Parliamentary Papers,* Commercial No. 177 of 1894.

[124] *Ibid.;* see also *Times,* June 21, 1894.

the big question of the trade of the people they neglect. . . . The world, seeing that England is unrivalled . . . in . . . manufactures . . . has of late years been devising schemes, by protective and prohibitive tariffs, to shut her out . . . and yet the most extraordinary thing is that, when the English people are offered the privilege that south of the Zambezi their goods shall be admitted forever on a fair basis, their rulers absolutely refuse. . . . But, Mr. Speaker, I do not mind that. I mean to fight the clause until the Imperial Government gives in, and I am quite certain that wiser counsels will ultimately prevail.[125]

Yet though the Home Government retreated some slight distance, it refused to countenance any step toward preference. The matter was settled, as Ripon had suggested, by the substitution of the words "imported goods" for "British goods." [126] But four years later when Joseph Chamberlain was Colonial Secretary, the Rhodes clause was embodied in the constitution of Southern Rhodesia. And, when another five years had elapsed, South Africa, following the example of Canada, granted a preference on British goods.[127]

If Canada and South Africa were in the van of the movement for an adjustment of imperial tariffs, the Australasian Colonies were not far behind. Living amidst the tension of European rivalries in the South Pacific, Australia's interest in the imperial connection had rested traditionally upon her desire for naval protection. But as Griffith had shown at the Colonial Conference of 1887, there was no lack of interest in trade as well as defense. Nor had Hofmeyr's attempt to demonstrate that preferential tariffs could contribute to the solution of *both* problems gone unnoticed.[128] In the spring and summer of 1893, Australia was plunged into a serious financial crisis.[129] Revelations of fraud on the part of the land banks had undermined the Colonies' credit, and prices fell precipitously.[130] Naturally, there was a desire for new trade outlets. Early in 1894, Robert Reid, Defense Minister of Victoria, and Thomas M'Ilwraith, Chief Secretary of Queensland, visited Britain, Canada, and the United States. Although M'Ilwraith was interested prima-

[125] Rhodes's speech of "yesterday," quoted in *Times,* June 20, 1894.

[126] F. W. Hirst and others, *Liberalism and the Empire,* p. 70.

[127] Regarding the Constitution of Southern Rhodesia, see *Cambridge History of the British Empire,* VIII, 739–40; regarding South African preference on imports from Britain, see A. J. Bruwer, *Protection in South Africa,* p. 148.

[128] See Frederick Young's letter and enclosure, *Times,* June 23, 1894.

[129] See *Times* for May and June, 1893.

[130] *Cambridge History of the British Empire,* VII, Pt. I, 371.

rily in the projected Canadian-Australian cable, he neglected no opportunity while in England to discuss Australia's need of a market for her wool.[131] Reid's main object, as he said, was "to make inquiries with a view to establishing markets for the products of this colony [Victoria] and generally extending its trade." That he was thinking in imperial terms is suggested by his observation that the manufacturing interests of the mother country were in a lowly state as "a result of the prevalent want of confidence exhibited by Britishers toward the colonists." [132]

Reid was, in fact, trying to secure the assent of the Imperial Government to the Australian Constitution Act Amendment to permit Australian Colonies to extend to all parts of the Empire the preferential advantages which they had been able heretofore to offer only each other; he was also urging the desirability of repealing the Belgian and German treaties.[133] "We in Australia," he told his British listeners, "want to trade as freely with Canada and South Africa as Kent trades with Surrey, or Surrey with Yorkshire. With the introduction of prohibitive tariffs and with foreign countries taking away our trade in all directions, our cry must be 'Britain for the British.' " [134] Tariff reformers in the mother country naturally wanted to make the acquaintance of these Australian visitors. An opportunity was found for Reid to address the Sheffield Chamber of Commerce; [135] and later both he and M'Ilwraith attended a United Empire Trade League luncheon, where they heard speeches by Vincent and Lowther, and themselves spoke in friendly terms of the League's objects.[136]

This colonial tariff-reform movement, as it may be called, reached a climax at the Intercolonial Conference at Ottawa in 1894. The Ottawa meeting was in one sense a sequel to the Colonial Conference of 1887, but, in another and very important sense, quite unique. Whereas the earlier gathering was sponsored by the Imperial Government on the occasion of the Queen's Jubilee, the *Intercolonial* Conference at Ottawa, as its very name suggests, was a distinctively colonial enterprise, brought about on colonial initiative at a colonial capital, with a representative of the British Gov-

131 *Times,* March 2, 1894.
132 *Ibid.,* Jan. 26, 1894.
133 *Ibid.,* March 26, 1894.
134 *Ibid.,* March 20, 1894.
135 *Ibid.,* Jan. 31, 1894.
136 *Ibid.,* March 21, 1894.

ernment attending not as a participant, but merely as an observer. Such a move, owing to the mother country's refusal to entertain the idea of preference or even to provide colonial delegates with an opportunity to present their views as they had in 1887, was, it would seem, almost inevitable. Salisbury had stated in 1889 that if Colonies desired to confer with one another, they were at liberty to do so without acting through the good offices of the mother country.[137] The Canadian Government had been thinking along these lines even earlier,[138] and in 1893 Mackenzie Bowell, accompanied by Sandford Fleming, visited Australia and put the seal on the plan.[139] The great questions, as indicated by the circular of invitation, were to be preferential trade and the projected Pacific cable.[140]

When the Conference convened June 28, 1894, delegates were present from Canada, New South Wales, Tasmania, Cape of Good Hope, South Australia, New Zealand, Victoria, and Queensland; Lord Jersey attended for the British Government "to hear and report what passes and to give information to the Conference on matters of fact." [141]

The Ottawa Conference passed three resolutions which in the history of the rise of imperial preference are of immense importance. The first asked for "Imperial legislation enabling the dependencies of the Empire to enter into agreements of commercial reciprocity, including power of making differential tariffs, with Great Britain or with one another." [142] This was for the benefit of the Australasian Colonies, who at the time had power to make preferential treaties among themselves, but not with any other member of the Empire. The second requested the mother country to remove from existing treaties any provisions "which prevent the self-governing dependencies of the Empire from entering into agreements of commercial reciprocity with each other or with Great Britain." [143] This, of course, was aimed at the Belgian and German treaties.

The third and most important resolution urged "the advisability of a customs arrangement between Great Britain and her Colonies

[137] *Times,* Aug. 3, 1889. [138] Jebb, *The Imperial Conference,* I, 141.
[139] *Journal of the Royal Colonial Institute,* XXVI, 85–86.
[140] Jebb, *op. cit.,* I, 163. [141] *Parliamentary Papers,* 1894 [c.–7553], p. 372.
[142] *Ibid.,* p. 82. [143] *Ibid.,* pp. 154–57.

by which trade within the Empire may be placed on a more favourable footing than that which is carried on with foreign countries"; and added that

> until the Mother Country can see her way to enter into customs arrangements with her Colonies it is desirable that . . . the Colonies of Great Britain, or such of them as may be disposed to accede to this view, *take steps to place each other's products in whole or in part on a more favoured customs basis than is accorded to the like products of foreign countries.*[144]

There could scarcely have been better evidence of the advance which the idea of preference had made in outlying parts of the Empire and of the impatience which colonial statesmen felt at the complacency of the mother country. The resolutions probably had a profound effect upon the British tariff-reform movement, whose leaders had often dwelt darkly upon the theme that if the mother country did not soon respond to colonial desires, the Empire was headed sooner or later for dissolution. On behalf of the United Empire Trade League, Howard Vincent sent the Ottawa Conference a cable gratefully acknowledging the delegates' endorsement of the League's policy.[145] The debates at Ottawa strongly suggest, indeed, that one of the primary purposes of the resolutions was to influence opinion in Britain. The tariff controversy in the mother country, said Foster, was

> verging towards the practical point, and it will have to be settled by the British people. . . . In the meantime the Colonies are . . . free . . . to take hold of this question and solve it for themselves. . . . Whatever the Colonies undertake to carry out will have by its pressure the power of causing thought and moulding the subsequent action of Great Britain itself.[146]

The aim was not to draw the Colonies apart from the Mother Country, but rather to create a system of intercolonial reciprocity

[144] Italics mine. Except for the initial portion of the third resolution, the voting on all resolutions was unanimous; in this instance, New South Wales, New Zealand, and Queensland opposed, largely on the grounds that the clause gave the impression of dictating to the mother country.

The resolution stated that the South African Customs Union, which included the foreign Orange Free State, should be "considered as part of the territory capable of being brought within the scope of the contemplated trade arrangements." Jebb, *op. cit.*, I, 188.

[145] *Financial Reformer,* July 15, 1894.

[146] Jebb, *op. cit.*, I, p. 181.

which might one day become the nucleus of a broader system of imperial preference. In this sense, the proceedings at Ottawa constitute a very important chapter in the history of tariff reform in Britain.

The immediate practical effects of the Ottawa Conference were, in the commercial sphere at least, not very large. Canada and the Cape opened negotiations for a preferential tariff agreement,[147] but apparently nothing concrete resulted. In 1895 New Zealand and South Australia concluded a reciprocal trade agreement which was to have lasted seven years, but which had to be terminated earlier when South Australia was merged in the Commonwealth; New Zealand and Canada concluded another of even shorter duration. These limited results may be attributed to several circumstances. In the first place, the Canadian Government in 1897 committed itself to a more ambitious program of preference by granting differential advantages to British goods without asking for favors in return. Secondly, the Australian Colonies were soon to forget almost everything else in their efforts to bring the federation movement to a successful conclusion. Next, the war in South Africa absorbed the Empire's whole attention. "When interest in that quarter began to wane, the Chamberlain movement was already in full swing; so that the question of intercolonial reciprocity, as a thing apart, could never again acquire a leading position." [148]

What stood out above everything else in the aftermath of the Ottawa Conference was the unyielding attitude of the Liberal Government in London. In the proceedings of the Conference itself, Lord Jersey, the British representative, had made no effort to hide his opinion that imperial preference was not likely to commend itself to the mother country; 76 percent of Britain's trade, he had reminded the delegates, was *still* with foreign countries.[149] Lord Ripon, the Colonial Secretary, elaborated this position in a circular dispatch to Colonial Governors in 1895.[150] The Government would welcome closer imperial trade relations on the basis of free trade, he said, but differential duties in favor of Colonial produce were "open to all the objections from the consumer's point of view which can be urged against a general duty." If the Colonies stood

[147] *Chamber of Commerce Journal,* May, 1895.
[148] Jebb, *op. cit.,* I, 192.
[149] *Parliamentary Papers,* 1894 [c.–7553], p. 195.
[150] *Ibid.,* 1895 [c.–7824].

to gain by the adoption of such a policy, their gain would "be altogether incommensurate with the loss to the Mother Country." As regards reciprocal agreements among the Colonies themselves, it would be necessary to advance with the utmost caution. Since the greater part of each Colony's trade was with other Colonies and the mother country, it would be difficult to give preference "solely at the expense of the foreigner, and without at the same time diverting trade from the Mother Country or from sister Colonies who may not be parties to the arrangement." Any such agreement would require "careful consideration in regard to its probable effect on the commerce of the rest of the Empire."

As regards the denunciation of the Belgian and German treaties, Ripon was equally adamant. The British Government had been informed by Belgium and Germany that the clauses in question could not be abrogated without denouncing the entire treaties, and this the British Government were by no means prepared to do. Ripon did, however, construe the treaties in such a way that while the Colonies could not grant preference to the mother country, they were at least free to grant preference to each other. His only further concession was in connection with the Australian request for repeal of legislation barring preferential agreements between Australian and non-Australian Colonies; on this head he reported that the obnoxious provisions had already been repealed.[151]

Ripon's dispatch, showing that even in 1895 a fairly literal brand of Cobdenism actuated Liberal policy,[152] may come as a surprise to some. But to tariff reformers it was an old story. Gladstone would not even receive a deputation from the United Empire Trade League in 1893; [153] and when conferring with representatives of the Imperial Federation League, he went out of his way to explain that it was impossible to entertain any idea of an Imperial *Zollverein*.[154] Even Rosebery seldom missed an opportunity to attack tariff reform.

Still, there were signs, in 1895, that the work of Fair Traders and tariff reformers had not been altogether without result. The

[151] See 58 and 59 Vict. Cap. 3.

[152] Compare Ripon's dispatch with Sir Thomas Farrer's speech at the Cobden Club banquet of 1895, in *Times*, Aug. 19, 1895.

[153] Gladstone to Vincent, printed in *Times*, April 13, 1893.

[154] *Times*, April 27, 1893.

Times, commenting on Ripon's dispatch, agreed with much that it contained; but added, cautiously, that there were some considerations relating to imperial trade which, while not the only ones, were "too important to be left out of account." One could grant that Britain's foreign trade far exceeded her trade with the Colonies; nevertheless, "under a customs union," imperial trade "would possess one quality well worth considering—it would be more stable, for it would no longer depend on the whims and fancies of other countries, and would no longer be exposed to the influence of hostile tariffs." Under existing circumstances, tariff changes in the United States or France could throw British investment and employment out of joint in a twinkling. "It is useless to argue that these trade dislocations inflict most injury on the country which causes them. All that we need care to know is that they inflict very grave injury on ourselves, and that it would be worth our while to get rid of them at some loss to the mere volume of our trade." [155]

The *Times,* after all, had not the habit of crusading for hopeless causes. With the loyalty of the Colonies at once apparent and strong, with fearsome coalitions massing on the continent of Europe, and with Germany and America moving fast on Britain's heels in the race for commercial supremacy, the time was preparing when some statesman of first rank would face the issue squarely and ask England to throw her precious free trade to the winds.

[155] *Times,* July 20, 1895.

V

TARIFF REFORM, INDUSTRY, AND AGRICULTURE 1881-1895

WHILE THE idea of protection, in one or another of its forms, was setting off controversies among imperialists, trade unionists, and members of the Conservative Party, the Fair Trade League was playing, sometimes in the light of day and sometimes far beneath the surface of events, a role which is difficult to appraise. An effort will be made in the present chapter to suggest in what manner and to what extent the members of the League made their influence felt. We shall then pass on to the question of what particular groups, industrial and agricultural, formed the backbone of the protectionist movement.

THE SPREAD OF FAIR TRADE

After establishing themselves in London, Fair Traders turned their attention to the provinces, where, as they never tired of reminding themselves, Parliaments and tariffs were made and unmade. They had their earliest success in Sheffield, where American tariff increases and vehement leading articles in Sir William Leng's *Daily Telegraph* had already done half the work.[1] In a town where a rise or fall of cutlery exports spelled a vast difference, tariffs, retaliation, and imperial preference were quite naturally congenial topics for discussion.

In September, 1881, at a small "meeting of prominent merchants and manufacturers," a Sheffield branch of the Fair Trade

1 See *Fair Trade,* Aug. 3, 1888, and Nov. 14, 1890. Five years earlier, it had been reported that one large Sheffield firm had been obliged to transfer all its business across the water, and a group of alarmed citizens had petitioned the Government to adopt retaliatory measures in combination with the Colonies. *Financial Reformer,* Dec. 1, 1876.

League was formed.[2] A month later some 3,000 people attended a great Fair Trade meeting in the Albert Hall and resolved that foreign tariffs were "working most injuriously to the welfare and prosperity of the nation, and endangering the steady employment, the fair wages, and the future well-being of our working classes." Further resolutions called for the adoption of the schemes of commercial union and reciprocity which the new League advocated.[3] The Fair Trade leaders in Sheffield were J. E. Bingham, the master cutler, a wealthy, self-made manufacturer; [4] and Benjamin Fletcher, a workingman who had lifted himself from humble origins to a position of some prominence in Sheffield local politics.[5] The combination of labor and capital which these men typified was always an important aim of Fair Traders. It was perhaps most successful in Sheffield, where the workers were, by and large, specialists in one type of work. To them it was cold comfort to be told by Cobdenites that when one trade shriveled and died as a result of foreign tariffs, employment could be found in other lines which were expanding.[6]

Save for these events in Sheffield, Fair Traders received little encouragement from the provinces in 1881. Branches at Liverpool, where the emphasis was on countervailing duties against bounties,[7] and at Coventry, where the old story of French competition and the ribbon trade was revived,[8] met with indifferent success. An attempt to install Fair Trade at Derby was checked when Cobdenites packed the inaugural meeting and carried a resolution urging continuation of free trade in perpetuity.[9] In manufacturing centers such as Oldham, Preston, and Leeds, Fair Trade ideas gained wide currency, but it would seem that there was not, for the moment, sufficient public demand to justify the formation of branches.[10]

Doubtless this stunted growth may be explained in part by the revival of trade which contemporaries marked in the closing months of 1881. "Everywhere trade is improving," said a woolen trade journal in November; [11] and a month later it added: "From Bradford, Leeds, Leicester, and other centers of industry, we learn that

[2] *Times,* Sept. 7, 1881.
[3] *Ibid.,* Oct. 5, 1881.
[4] *Fair Trade,* June 27, 1890.
[5] *Ibid.,* Aug. 3, 1888 and March 28, 1890.
[6] Tyler, *The Struggle for Imperial Unity,* p. 64.
[7] *Times,* Sept. 13, 1881.
[8] *Ibid.; Pall Mall Gazette,* Sept. 13, 1881.
[9] *Times,* Oct. 5, 1881.
[10] See Oldham *Standard* and Preston *Guardian* for Nov. and Dec., 1881.
[11] *Wool and Textile Fabrics,* Nov. 12, 1881.

trade is very animated." [12] As early as September 15, 1881, the *Times* had said of Fair Trade, "We have seen it in its full force, and it does not amount to much." In December another observer remarked that

> after a sickly existence of a few weeks, this movement . . . perished of sheer inanition, leaving behind it no other perceptible result than the proof it incidentally afforded of the readiness of Tory leaders to countenance for party purposes opinions which it would be an insult to their understandings to suppose that they really shared.[13]

Even Ecroyd had to admit the decline. He believed that "the question would grow as the years passed on," but for the time being he expected little progress.[14]

The decline of Fair Trade after 1881 may be measured by the expenditures of the League during the next few years. In the first twelve-month period something over £2,054 was paid out; in the second, only £998.[15] The figures on public meetings and the distribution of literature included in the second annual report in July, 1883, tell a similar story.[16] At most of the meetings during this period attendance was disappointingly small.[17]

After 1884, when there was, significantly, a sharp drop in British export figures,[18] Fair Trade was on the move again. The next four years were the period of the League's greatest activity. Expenditures in 1884 were up to £1,636; in 1885, £1,857.[19] In 1884, branches or local correspondents were established in 449 towns and industrial centers; 436 public meetings were held; 417,096 pamphlets and leaflets distributed.[20] In the following year the number of branches and local correspondents surpassed 500, and more than a million tracts and pamphlets were circulated.[21] The most important undertaking was the publication of the weekly *Fair Trade,* which appeared from 1885 to 1891. Its editor was James Edgecome.[22] Though the paper was frankly dedicated to

[12] *Ibid.,* Dec. 3, 1881.

[13] Manchester *Examiner and Times,* Dec. 31, 1881. See also *Daily Chronicle,* Dec. 31, 1881.

[14] Preston *Herald,* Dec. 14, 1881.

[15] *Fair Trade,* May 6, 1887.

[16] See *Times,* July 30, 1883.

[17] *Ibid.,* Nov. 27, 1883, for example.

[18] *Parliamentary Papers,* 1909 [c. 4954].

[19] *Fair Trade,* May 6, 1887.

[20] *Times,* March 19, 1885. See also the barrage of letters on fiscal policy in *Times,* Nov. 20, 24, 27, 28, Dec. 5, 12, 26, 1884, and Jan. 5, 9, 23, 1885.

[21] *Fair Trade,* March 26, 1886.

[22] See above, p. 19, note 86.

keeping the fiscal question alive without sparing the enemy, its tone was, save for occasional lapses, uncommonly high for a publication of its type.[23]

This burst of activity corresponded with the emergence of tariff reform as an important political question in the mid-eighties. To meet the needs of the time, the League underwent a drastic reorganization in 1886. Its national structure was made to conform, as nearly as possible, to the pattern of constituencies in the United Kingdom. In each constituency was established a local lodge, which was to devote itself

> to obtaining new recruits, especially among voters, taking charge of local petitions to Parliament, arranging meetings and lectures . . . seeing that literature, handbills, and wall-posters . . . are well circulated in the Lodge's district and the members working at election times . . . on behalf of candidates who shall adopt the Fair Trade platform.

In each county a "Central Lodge" was to be formed. Supervision of the entire machinery was in the hands of a General Council, with headquarters in London. Central Lodges were to contribute £5 yearly to the national war chest; Local Lodges, 1*s*. for each member, in return for which all League literature would be received at cost price.[24]

After the reorganization, came an appeal for added funds.[25] It would seem that the response was not wholly unsatisfactory, for in 1887, during the several months preceding the Oxford meeting of the Conservative Party, Fair Trade meetings were held in more than 66 towns. In most cases arrangements were made with the local Chamber of Commerce (or Agriculture); meetings sponsored by these organizations were addressed by tried and trusted Fair Trade speakers, who introduced protectionist resolutions and defended them in debate.

In one place, however, Fair Traders overreached themselves. This was in Manchester, where an underhanded attempt was made to pack the Chamber of Commerce with sympathizers who could be

[23] Special mention should be made of the Special Extra Number of Dec. 31, 1887, containing a brief history of the movement, thumbnail sketches of the leaders, and a large picture of the Executive Committee. It was said that "Orders had been left for quite 30,000 copies, and as many more were wanted at once." *Fair Trade,* Jan. 6, 1888. This is our only hint as to the circulation of the paper.

[24] *Ibid.,* Aug. 13, 1886. [25] *Ibid.,* May 6, 1887.

trusted to pass a protectionist resolution. The great prestige and well-known Cobdenite leanings of the Manchester Chamber tempted some protectionists to play a reckless game. In 1886, Alfred Morris, a Fair Trade League lecturer, was sent to Lancashire to investigate the possibility of founding branches there. In Manchester, with the help of two local businessmen, Sibson S. Rigg and H. T. Hibbert, he founded a Fair Trade branch, carefully disguised under the name "Manchester Union" or "British Union." [26] *Fair Trade* frankly admitted that the Union was "advocating precisely the same views as those of the Fair Trade League" and working "in entire unison with the Fair Trade operations in other parts of the kingdom." [27]

The assault on the Chamber of Commerce developed slowly. Hibbert, already a member, at first represented the protectionist position almost single-handed; his failure to convince his fellow members "induced Mr. Sibson Rigg and others who sympathized with his Fair Trade views, *to join the Chamber for the sake of assisting Mr. Hibbert.*" [28] During the next two years, the Fair Traders bided their time. Upon several occasions they introduced protectionist resolutions, but were defeated, once by only a single vote.[29] At length, at a meeting in December, 1888, they found themselves momentarily in a majority and offered a resolution urging that imported goods should pay that equal and proportional share of taxation "which they would have paid if produced or manufactured in the United Kingdom." [30] Free traders, seeing that they were outnumbered, rose during the debate and left the Chamber "almost in

[26] *Ibid.*, Nov. 25, 1887, May 6, and June 13, 1890. Rigg was associated with Rigg Bros., cotton spinners and manufacturers. Hibbert was head of Isaac Hibbert and Co., flour merchants and importers of sago, flour, and farina; he was also mayor and alderman of Chorley and a member of the Manchester Chamber of Commerce.

[27] *Ibid.*, Nov. 25, 1887. The membership included: the Duke of Manchester, who was president, the Marquis of Exeter, Viscount Torrington, Lord Napier of Magdala, Molesworth-Hepworth, E. Burgis, H. H. Howorth, Arthur H. Sykes, S. Chester Thompson, J. Croston, R. Boyd, and W. F. Ecroyd. Twenty-nine Members of Parliament were members.

[28] This was in May, 1886. Italics mine. See *Fair Trade,* June 13, 1890, and *Times,* May 5, 1886.

[29] Manchester Chamber of Commerce MSS, Nov. 1, 1886 and April 25, 1887; *Times,* Nov. 2 and 3, 1886; *Fair Trade,* Nov. 5 and 12, 1886.

In February, 1887, the Board of Directors of the Chamber voted, 7 to 3, against receiving a delegation from the National Fair Trade League. Manchester Chamber of Commerce MSS, Feb. 23, 1887.

[30] Manchester Chamber of Commerce MSS, Dec. 19, 1888.

a body." [31] The resolution was carried without division, and copies were sent to the Prime Minister and to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

In the minds of many Englishmen, the Manchester Chamber of Commerce spoke upon economic questions with the authority of a high court. This sudden abandonment of its traditional rock-ribbed Cobdenism might have been a matter of the highest significance. No wonder, then, that the free-trade members of the Chamber, who were, after all, still a majority, immediately raised the cry of fraud. One of them pointed out in a letter to the *Times* that only eighty of the Chamber's total membership of more than a thousand had attended the crucial meeting. It was publicly charged that the principal supporter of the protectionist motion was Alfred Morris, "the paid Secretary of the recently established 'British Union,' " who had joined the Chamber to forward the Fair Trade interests.[32] With feeling on both sides running high, the Board of Directors declared their "unfaltering adherence to the principles of Free Trade so often affirmed by this Chamber," and resolved that the protectionist resolution did "not represent the views of the Chamber as a whole." [33] The Board's action was later upheld, 556 votes to 221.[34]

There can be little question that Fair Traders were responsible for what was at best a devious parliamentary maneuver and what might have been, and was, interpreted as a clear case of misrepresentation. *Fair Trade* said: "It has been through the members of the 'British Union' that action has been instituted and resolutely followed up . . . in the Manchester Chamber of Commerce." [35]

[31] *Times,* Dec. 20, 1888. [32] Letter from William Fogg in *ibid.,* Dec. 26, 1888.

[33] Manchester Chamber of Commerce MSS, Jan. 7, 1889. Morris and Hibbert claimed that the Board meeting was attended by only 10 of 24 members and that all save one of those present were Liberals and Cobdenites. See *Manchester Courier and Lancashire General Advertiser,* Jan. 9, 1889; also *Times,* Jan. 9, 1889.

[34] Manchester Chamber of Commerce MSS, Jan. 18, 1889. The Fair Trade group later circularized the members, asking whether they favored a "straightforward discussion on the floor of the Chamber" or a "decision without discussion by circular as proposed by a minority of the Board of Directors." Alfred Morris claimed that a majority of 234 votes was in favor of discussion. *Fair Trade,* Jan. 25, 1889.

Several further attempts were made to carry protectionist resolutions at Chamber meetings, but each time the Fair Traders were defeated. Manchester Chamber of Commerce MSS, Jan. 30, 1889; *Fair Trade,* Feb. 8 and July 19, 1889, May 9, 1890, May 1 and 15, 1891.

[35] *Fair Trade,* Dec. 28, 1888.

Later, when recalling the protectionist vote of 1888, *Fair Trade* admitted that it was Hibbert's work and had come "after careful thought and preparation by himself and friends . . . backed up by the action of the 'British Union.' " [36] It is perhaps worth adding that the annual report of the British Union for 1888 was concerned almost exclusively with progress made in the Manchester Chamber.[37]

In contrast to the disappointments encountered in Manchester, the welcome found waiting for Fair Traders in Birmingham is illuminating. If cotton merchants were, on the whole, unbending in their loyalty to Cobdenism, the manufacturers of iron and steel products were, in large numbers, beginning to entertain doubts. Representatives of the Fair Trade League who addressed the Birmingham Chamber of Commerce in March, 1887, were rewarded with a unanimous resolution that "this meeting approves of their recommendations in favour of a change in the fiscal policy of the country." [38] The following January, a Birmingham branch of the National Fair Trade League was established. The moving spirit was Henry Hawkes, a manufacturer of steel buttons and toys, who had been a member of the Fair Trade Executive Committee since 1881.[39] Hawkes' chief collaborater was William Priest, a partner in the Quadrant Tricycle Company.[40] Leading members were R. P. Yates and Ralph Heaton. In Birmingham there was apparently no necessity to cloak protectionist aims in misleading language; men who desired Fair Trade boldly admitted as much. Even P. A. Muntz, who sat in Parliament and had to temporize to some extent in order to keep Liberal Unionists happy, made it known that while he had "not thought it wise" to declare himself a Fair Trader, he was "clearly in sympathy" with the aims of the Fair Trade League.[41] In 1888, Birmingham was the scene of the annual Fair Trade national conference, the first to be held outside London.[42]

In the mid-eighties, numerous protectionist societies sprang up in other parts of the kingdom. There was, for example, the West of England Society for the Preservation of Agriculture and Other Industries, founded in 1886 by S. W. Poynter. Poynter argued that

[36] *Ibid.*, June 13, 1890.
[37] *Ibid.*, Feb. 1, 1889.
[38] *Ibid.*, March 18, 1887.
[39] *Ibid.*, Oct. 17, 1890.
[40] *Ibid.*, Nov. 28, 1890.
[41] *Times*, Jan. 6, 1888.
[42] *Ibid.*, June 1, 1888.

protectionist farmers ought to agitate independently, because the Fair Trade League was dominated by industrialists, from whom in the last resort farmers could expect nothing.[43] Closely associated with his group—so closely, indeed, that at times it is difficult to distinguish the two—was the so-called West of England Association for the Defense of National Industry, under the leadership of James Hunt. Sometimes, it appears, Hunt and Poynter worked together, but for reasons which are difficult to fathom, they preferred to maintain separate organizations.[44] A third agricultural group was the Land and Labour Defense Association. It was founded in Hereford in 1887, and within a year seven branches were established.[45] Another Fair Trade society parading under an assumed name was the British and Irish Free Trade Society, formed at Glasgow early in 1887.[46] Still others were the Workmen's Association for the Defense of British Industry and the Society for the Defense of British Industry, which have been mentioned above.[47] It must be emphasized that these organizations were all part and parcel of the Fair Trade movement. Some admitted it, and those which did not advocated Fair Trade without calling it by that name. All of them, said an annual report, "have practically worked as though they were branches of the League." [48]

Shortly before the crucial Conservative Party Conference of 1887, the Fair Trade League took steps to bind these scattered forces together. All protectionist societies were invited to send one or two representatives to attend a conference "to consider generally the present position of the movement, and to adopt measures of joint action during the coming winter and spring." [49] The representatives assembled in London early in November, but agreement eluded them. Dixon-Hartland said the time was ripe for bringing pressure upon the Government, and the assembly cheered. He said he could not support a duty on corn, and the assembly groaned.

[43] *Fair Trade,* Nov. 25, 1887. The Society was launched at a meeting in Bristol.

[44] *Ibid.,* Nov. 25, 1887. [45] *Ibid.,* Nov. 25, 1887; also Aug. 17, 1888.

[46] British and Irish Free Trade Association, *Free Trade in International Commerce,* especially pp. 23–25; also *Fair Trade,* Nov. 25, 1887. The moving spirit seems to have been one W. V. Jackson. It was openly admitted that the misleading name had been chosen to disarm the prejudiced; some expected that it would be changed to the Scottish Fair Trade League; but so far as can be known, this was not done.

[47] See above, pp. 55–56, especially note 124. [48] *Fair Trade,* June 1, 1888.

[49] *Ibid.,* Oct. 14, 1887. Proceedings of the conference appear in *ibid.,* Nov. 4 and 11, 1887. See also *Times,* Nov. 3 and 4, 1887.

Lord Stanley of Alderley asked for 10*s.* on corn. And so it went. It was moved that the groups establish a single headquarters in London; that they have a common staff of speakers and a common expense fund; that they adopt the name "National Fair Trade League for the Restoration of Prosperity of Trade and Agriculture by Fiscal Reform." But the differences could not be reconciled. After naming a committee to explore the possibilities of federation, the Conference adjourned without settling anything of consequence.[50]

For more than a year the negotiations for combined action dragged on. At length it was decided that the various societies need not change their names, since for local reasons they might not want to be identified with Fair Trade. They were, however, to be loosely bound together under the Fair Trade League, and were to elect representatives to the League's Associated Council, which was to take the place of the old General Council. The common program called for "moderate import duties upon all competing foreign products, other than raw materials for industry, leaving the definition of such raw materials and the special treatment of Indian and Colonial products to be determined by the Legislature." These changes, embodied in amendments to the constitution of the Fair Trade League, were finally adopted at the quarterly meeting in the summer of 1889.[51]

THE DECLINE OF FAIR TRADE

The Conference of 1887 and the ensuing negotiations marked a turning point in the history of the Fair Trade League. For six years members had been waiting for the spontaneous growth of protectionism finally manifested in the formation of these scattered societies. But when it came to formulating a common program, the barriers were all but insuperable. Imperialist, manufacturer, farmer

[50] The Fair Trade League, however, adopted the suggestion that a common fund be made available to anyone advocating fiscal reform. Several of the leaders executed a trust deed for a "National Fair Trade Fund," to be applied not to any special organization, but to Fair Trade purposes generally. Those executing the deed subscribed £5,000; S. C. Lister alone subscribed £1,000. The first trustees were Lister, Lloyd, and Percy Wyndham; concurring in the deed were Viscount Torrington, Lord Stanley of Alderley, Sir H. Hoare, Ecroyd, Edward Charles Healey, and J. E. Bingham. See *Fair Trade,* Nov. 11 and 25, 1887.

[51] *Ibid.,* Supplement, July 5, 1889; also March 8, 1889. A list of the Associated Council appeared in *Ibid.,* July 4, 1890.

—each had his own idea as to the shape which the program ought to take; the only basis of agreement was opposition to free trade. Said the *Times,* apropos of the search for a "common program": "It is like proposing a toast in favour of the Pretender and then immediately adding—'But who Pretender is and who the King, God bless us all, 'tis quite another thing.' " [52]

When the purely negative agitation against free trade had accomplished as much as could be expected, and when the time came for setting forth detailed proposals, the Fair Trade League became the scene of a tug of war that paralyzed all forward movement. *Fair Trade* complained that there were "a very large number of titular Fair Traders, who strive to protect that class of industry in which they themselves are interested, and think that they should be especially treated; but when a similar remedy is planned for others, they have some other panacea." [53] Again, members had to be reminded that "In practical politics great principles can alone be carried by a mutual surrender of extreme points, and the highest patriotism is to be found in honest compromise." [54] The League was further weakened by the silence which the political situation imposed on some members and by the improvement in export figures which was noticeable after 1887.[55] As trade picked up, leadership of the protectionist movement passed ever more into the hands of farmers, who were, after all, fighting a hopeless battle for the "dear loaf." The reports for 1888 and 1889 showed a distinct lull in Fair Trade activity. In 1888 only 293,000 pamphlets and leaflets were distributed, and 94 public meetings held —a sharp drop. 1889 was no better.[56]

The decline continued until 1891. Fair Traders recognized that the only way to keep the tariff issue alive was to emphasize its imperial implications. The report of 1888 noted that tariff reform could be accomplished only "from the side of Commercial Federation with our Empire—and with Canada as a first step to the rest." [57] In other words, outright protection had to be thrown overboard. In view of the history of the League, that meant sooner or later cutting all ties with the past. Early in 1891, there-

[52] *Times,* Dec. 17, 1887.
[53] *Fair Trade,* Nov. 12, 1886.
[54] *Ibid.,* Feb. 11, 1887.
[55] *Parliamentary Papers,* 1909 [c. 4954].
[56] See *Fair Trade,* Dec. 28, 1888, and July 4, 1890.
[57] *Ibid.,* Dec. 28, 1888.

fore, the Fair Trade League closed its doors, and many of its members joined Howard Vincent's United Empire Trade League. Some hard-shell protectionists formed a "Fair Trade Club" to render "assistance to all and every kindred society in promoting the objects each has in view"; and £5,000 was subscribed for this purpose.[58] A few Fair Trade Club publications appeared; there were occasional banquets and letters to the *Times*.[59] But Fair Trade as a protectionist movement was dead. And Fair Trade as an imperialist movement was swallowed up in larger events which have been recorded above.

TARIFF REFORM AND INDUSTRY

It is easy to see that the advance of the Fair Trade League and indeed of the whole tariff-reform movement was seriously retarded by conflicts arising between various groups demanding protection, particularly by the conflict between farmers and manufacturers. It is quite another thing, however, to determine the extent to which farming and industrial groups took up protection. We must be content with only a few tentative suggestions.

Let us begin with industry. The early protests against free trade during the fifties and sixties had an unmistakable industrial bias and the same was true of views expressed by the *Foreign Times* during the seventies. Among the founders of the Fair Trade League were a sugar refiner, a banker and publisher with interests in iron and steel, a manufacturer of silks, and another manufacturer of woolens and worsteds.[60] These were later joined by a goodly number of farmers, but Britain's concern for her "cheap loaf" would have made protection virtually a dead issue had it been advocated by farmers alone. There can be no question that the tariff-reform movement derived its real strength from the side of industry and that it prospered, as a rule, roughly in proportion as industry was depressed.

In what industries were demands for protection most commonly heard? The literature of tariff reform does not yield statistics on

[58] *Ibid.*, Dec. 25, 1891.

[59] See James Edgecome, ed., *Fair Trade Manual*. For Fair Trade Club dinners see *Times*, July 31, 1891, Feb. 10, 1893, March 9, 1893. See also Edgecome's letter to the *Times* of July 27, 1893.

[60] See above, pp. 17–19 and 23.

this point, but from time to time it throws out significant hints. In biographies printed in *Fair Trade* one finds here and there a little light, and a stray pamphlet occasionally opens a wide window. One assumes, of course, that industries most frequently mentioned correspond roughly to those in which tariff reformers had a special interest. If the assumption is correct, iron and steel must be placed very near the top of the list. One is not surprised, for the cheapening of steel in the eighties "meant the scrapping on a wholesale scale of the greatest iron industry in the world," [61] and marked the emergence of Germany as an industrial rival of the first importance. The price of steel rails fell from £12 1*s.* 1*d.* per ton in 1874 to £5 7*s.* 6*d.* in 1883; the price of iron rails fell almost by half. In the fourteen years after 1870 British pig-iron production increased 31 percent; "yet during the same period the quantity produced by other nations increased nearly 138 percent." [62] No wonder that manufacturers of iron and steel were among the first to question the wisdom of free trade; less wonder still, in view of the relatively high proportion of iron and steel exports going to self-governing Colonies: 14 percent in 1880, 20 percent in 1892.[63] This meant that imperial preference held out high promise. In such industries as cotton, which sent only 4 percent or 5 percent of total exports to self-governing Colonies, the opposite was the case. The Manchester cotton merchants, with their eyes fixed on the Levant, India, and China, gave Fair Traders a notoriously cold reception.

Along with iron and steel went hardware and cutlery, implements and tools. Complaints about foreign competition and foreign tariffs were here numerous and loud, particularly in Sheffield and Birmingham after each upward jerk of the United States tariff. As for the proportion of exports going to self-governing Colonies, the figures in 1892 were 28 percent for hardware and cutlery, 23 percent for implements and tools.[64] Next came woolens and worsteds, bringing Ecroyd and a host of lesser manufacturers into the picture. And so on down the list, through numerous specialized interests: sugar refining, jewelry, guns, watches, ribbons, bi-

[61] L. C. A. Knowles, *Industrial and Commercial Revolutions*, p. 143.
[62] *Parliamentary Papers*, 1886 [c. 4893], p. viii.
[63] Tyler, *Struggle for Imperial Unity*, pp. 51–52.
[64] *Ibid.*, p. 54.

cycles, boots and shoes, shipbuilding, tinplates, earthenware, and silk.

These conclusions are, on the whole, borne out by the testimony presented before the Royal Commission on the Depression in Trade and Industry in 1886. The most interesting evidence is to be found in questionnaires filled out by some one hundred Chambers of Commerce.[65] Of these, 46 urged that foreign tariffs must somehow be dealt with; 18 called for measures to stimulate trade with the colonies. Closer examination reveals that iron and steel, woolens and worsteds were their predominant interests, while other trades follow in much the same order that they are listed above.

The Royal Commission testimony must, however, be taken cautiously. There is no evidence that all, or nearly all, of the Chambers of Commerce desiring action against foreign tariffs would have gone so far as to advocate reciprocity; frequently they urged "negotiations" to be carried on by the Foreign Office or by the Ministry of Commerce which they hoped would soon be created. Nor is there evidence that closer trade relations with the Colonies was understood to mean the adoption of imperial preference. There is, on the other hand, abundant evidence that sharp difference of opinion existed within many chambers and that obscure language was deliberately chosen to brush over these differences. Even the Sheffield Chamber had to report disagreement on the question of tariffs, suggesting at the same time that any measures taken to strengthen imperial relations would undoubtedly improve trade. Again, after the Council of the Nottingham Chamber had replied in a free-trade sense to the Commission's formal request, witnesses reported that a subsequent meeting revealed that "the action of the council did not represent the views of the majority." [66]

Among the witnesses called to testify before the Commissioners, there was no lack of protectionist sentiment, but what stands out above all is the hesitation and doubt of those holding these views. There was apparently a widespread belief that although a protec-

[65] See *Parliamentary Papers,* 1886 [c. 4621], pp. 73–113; and 1886 [c. 4715], pp. 384–408.

[66] *Ibid.,* 1886 [c. 4715], p. 245.

tive tariff would bring relief, there was scarcely any hope of obtaining it. A silk manufacturer of Macclesfield stated that depression had come to his trade "almost step by step with the removal of protection"; but when asked if he wanted protection, replied; "No. I do not think, even if I were to propose it, that there would be any chance of getting it." [67] A papermaker who had to be pressed before committing himself finally admitted that protection "would benefit our trade very much," but hastened to explain that he could not "answer that question generally." [68] A manufacturer of heavy steel, after endorsing imperial preference, added: "It is a difficult subject, I admit, and whether it is feasible or not, I do not know." [69] These are only a few examples. Protectionists were still in a minority, and no one knew it better than they.

That the protectionist movement as a whole gathered strength as industry was depressed and lost it as industry revived would appear to be almost beyond dispute. The rapid growth of protectionism during the late seventies and the formation of the Fair Trade League in 1881 were clearly connected with the nose dive of export industries from 1873 to 1879. Similarly, we may assume that the improvement in trade between 1880 and 1883 explains in large measure the accompanying decline in protectionist agitation. The depression of 1884–86 brought tariff reform to the fore again; recovery in the last years of the decade had the expected opposite effect. With the depression of the early nineties came renewed agitation; but then other factors, particularly the imperial factor, came into play, and the correlation was destroyed. What stands out is that tariff reformers were usually about a year behind the business cycle. The year 1881 was for them a year of great activity; the business cycle was hesitantly pointing upward. The same was true in 1887. In 1891, however, tariff reformers were a little more prompt.

So much for industry. Among farmers, protectionist feeling ebbed and flowed with a somewhat different rhythm. It will be well, therefore, to start at the beginning and tell the story of farm protectionism year by year.

[67] See *Parliamentary Papers,* 1886 [c. 4715], pp. 272, 274.
[68] *Ibid.,* 1886 [c. 4893], p. 8.
[69] *Ibid.,* 1886 [4715], p. 108.

TARIFF REFORM AND AGRICULTURE

When the Fair Trade League was formed, disaster had already struck British agriculture. The half dozen summers since 1875 had been the worst in memory: there was rain and cold and little sun. In times past, short crops had brought their own compensation in higher prices. But now, following upon the development of railways, agricultural machinery, and faster shipping, a flood of imports from the American West drove prices steadily downward. The average annual import of food for 1867–69 had been £79 million; in 1877–79 it was £133 million. In nearly every county of England and Scotland, and in some parts of Wales, there was "distress of unprecedented severity." At last England was face to face with the full consequences of Corn Law repeal.[70]

Here, obviously, was fertile ground for Fair Trade ideas. Many landlords like the Duke of Rutland and Lord Stanley of Alderley had not reconciled themselves to repeal, even while prices remained high. "He did not believe in it," one old Tory squire was reported to say; "he was a protectionist, and he was not going to change because a lot of men were making money . . . he had been born a Protectionist, lived a Protectionist, and if it did not matter to anyone else (or for the matter of that, if it did) he proposed to die a Protectionist." [71] In 1879 MacIver and John Sangster were turning up at scattered farmers' meetings, where resolutions were passed endorsing protection and protectionist candidates for Parliament.[72] By 1881 the agricultural journals and the London press were taking frequent notice of such meetings and opening their columns to correspondence urging everything from "light duties on barley and rye" to "protective duties as they were in 1845." [73] In Parliament, although there were no full-dress debates on pro-

[70] *Ibid.*, 1882 [c. 3309], pp. 11–14. The resulting tragedy was told in Sir James Caird's statistics: taking five bad seasons from the period preceding 1861 and five from the period after 1873, he found that in the former the average produce of wheat per acre had been 24 bushels, the average price per quarter, 61/1; while in the latter the figures were 19 bushels and 49/10. *Ibid.*

[71] J. Hurleston Leche, quoted in *Fair Trade,* Oct. 31, 1890. The statement appears to have been made in the sixties.

[72] See, for example, *Foreign Times,* Aug. 16, Sept. 27, and Nov. 8, 1879.

[73] *Agricultural Gazette,* Sept. 19, 1881. See also the *Chamber of Agriculture Journal and Farmers' Chronicle,* Nov. 14, 1881; and *Daily Chronicle,* Feb. 24, 1881.

tection, members from agricultural districts were bringing the subject in through the side door, so to speak, whenever debates on commercial treaties or general fiscal policy offered the opportunity.[74]

A climax of a sort was reached in 1881, when, at by-elections in Lincolnshire and Durham, strongly protectionist candidates were returned. James Lowther triumphed in Lincolnshire after asserting "unhesitatingly that some means for stopping unfair and undue competition must be entertained" and that he was not afraid of "the bugbear of Free Trade." [75] "You have returned an answer to the question of Free Trade and Fair Trade . . ." he told electors after his victory; "the answer of North Lincolnshire has sounded the death knell of the Manchester school." [76] In North Durham the issue of protection was somewhat obscured by County Franchise and the Land Question, but the return of an outspoken protectionist Conservative was widely hailed as a Fair Trade victory.[77]

Yet one cannot escape the impression that in 1881 and indeed for several years thereafter, the demands for agricultural protection issued in the main from large landowners whose right to speak for the whole farming community was very much in doubt. Many tenants and farm laborers suspected that Fair Traders intended merely to divert attention from the rent question and land reform.[78] In Aberdeenshire, a meeting of several hundred farmers with obvious Radical leanings resolved "that it is hopeless to look for relief by returning to Protection under the guise of Fair Trade or reciprocity, that such a proposal is both undesirable and impractical." [79] The tenant farmers of James Howard's influential Farmers' Alliance branded "the agitation for 'fair trade' as a delusion and a snare," calculated to keep up rents and postpone the

[74] Sometimes an agitation can best be measured by the quality of opposition it arouses: in this case Lord Hartington, James Caird, the Earl of Jersey, and the Earl of Kimberley were only a few of the free traders who felt obliged to speak out. Bradford *Observer,* Nov. 5, 1881; *Pall Mall Gazette,* Nov. 18, 1881; *Agricultural Economist,* Oct. 1, 1881; *Daily News,* June 23, 1881.

[75] Lincolnshire *Chronicle,* Aug. 30, 1881. [76] *Ibid.,* Sept. 6, 1881.

[77] Durham *Chronicle,* Aug. 26 and Sept. 9, 1881.

[78] See, for example, I. S. Leadam, *What Protection Does for the Farmer and Labourer,* 5th ed., pp. 51–53.

[79] *Daily Free Press* (Aberdeen), Sept. 9, 1881; *Herald and Weekly Free Press* (Aberdeen), Sept. 10, 1881.

fundamental land reforms "which are the only true remedies in the hands of Parliament for restoring prosperity to the farming interests." [80] When these charges were taken up by the Liberal press, the larger farmers and landowners hastily covered their tracks by defeating a protectionist resolution in the Central and Associated Chambers of Agriculture; not, we judge from the debates, because of any passionate devotion to free trade, but because they preferred to wait to see which way the wind was going to blow.[81]

At the same time the opinion was widely shared that although protection for farm products might be desirable, farmers who advocated it were wasting valuable time, since no British Parliament would dare to vote for it. There was some justice in this view. More than one election had been turned by a heart-rending description of the "hungry forties," when, as Joseph Chamberlain, who knew the formula well, put it, "People walked the streets like gaunt shadows, and not like human beings." [82] John Bright mentioned the "dear loaf" so often that it was said a little girl identified him to her teacher as "the gentleman who invented bread." [83] Even Joseph Arch, head of the Agricultural Laborers Union, wrote: "I well remember eating barley bread, and I shall always do my best to prevent those wretched times being repeated by taxing the poor man's loaf." [84] Naturally, there was room to doubt whether agricultural protection lay within the bounds of practical politics. Instead of trying to convince Great Britain to abandon free trade, said one Scot farmer, protectionists ought to "try their hand at damming up the Gulf Stream as a first experiment." [85] James Howard argued that even if a tariff on food were obtained, it would soon be repealed, leaving farmers who had expanded production to lose heavily.[86] Many gave up hope for a duty on wheat and confined their efforts to barley, oats, meat, wool, and the like.[87] Others preferred merely to wait:

[80] *Agricultural Gazette,* Sept. 19, 1881; *Chamber of Agriculture Journal,* Sept. 19, 1881; *Times,* Sept. 13, 1881.

[81] *Chamber of Agriculture Journal,* Nov. 14, 1881.

[82] F. W. Hirst, *From Adam Smith to Philip Snowden,* p. 25.

[83] *Globe,* Nov. 25, 1885.

[84] *Fair Trade,* Nov. 1, 1889.

[85] *Daily Free Press* (Aberdeen), Sept. 9, 1881.

[86] James Howard, *The Science of Trade.*

[87] W. C. Tabor, *Free Trade,* p. 23. Tabor was a member of the Fair Trade League and the National Association for the Preservation of Agriculture and Other Industries.

If I may venture to offer a word of advice to my brother farmers [said C. S. Reade, M.P.] . . . I would suggest to them the inexpediency of the agricultural interest being the first to suggest a return to protective duties. However just such a demand may be, if the farmers ask for it the whole manufacturing and mining interest will be arrayed against them; whereas if the cry for reciprocity should come from the towns, the country districts could then take up the demand with a much better prospect of success.[88]

Perhaps the greatest difficulty facing the farm protectionist movement in the early eighties was that scarcely anyone yet quite realized to what extent the position of British agriculture had been altered by the influx of food from America. The farmer on the farm knew very well the effect of the weather on his prospects; but he had to plow through tables of import statistics to discover the effect of American wheat. Most witnesses appearing before the Commissioners of Agriculture in 1881 named the weather as the primary cause of depression and foreign competition as the secondary cause.[89] As John Bright said, you could build your tariff sky-high, but it would not entice the sun from behind the clouds. Before urging protection, many farmers had to learn where the shoe pinched; and not a few did learn in the course of the eighties. After 1882 came a succession of comparatively good seasons, but the depression gave no promise of lifting. The conclusion: foreign competition, not bad crops, was at the root of the matter; and the next great agricultural inquiry, held in the early nineties, showed that there was wide agreement on this point.[90]

One task which the Fair Trade League set for itself in the eighties was to educate farmers in the damaging effects of American imports. Deputations were sent up and down the kingdom to address farmers' meetings and to introduce Fair Trade resolutions. A typical meeting was that held by the Lincolnshire Chamber of Agriculture to receive a delegation including James Edgecome and Alfred Morris. Both these gentlemen made Fair Trade speeches, and after some debate it was resolved that "false free trade is a failure obtained at the expense of the native producers." [91] Similar

[88] *British Empire,* Aug. 16, 1879. [89] *Parliamentary Papers,* 1882 [c. 3309].
[90] *Ibid.,* 1897 [c. 8540], pp. 43–53.
[91] *Fair Trade,* Dec. 24, 1886; *Times,* Dec. 18, 1886.

results were obtained at many other meetings.[92] Soon some farmers began to act on their own initiative, forming several nominally independent protectionist societies.[93] By 1886–87, the trend of opinion was unmistakable. At a meeting of hop growers of Kent and Sussex a committee was appointed to confer with other associations for the purpose of impressing upon Parliament the need for immediate remedial legislation.[94] At Oxford, 500 tenant farmers voted for protection.[95] "The legislative wrongs of half a century ago must be speedily dealt with" and foreign competition "brought into fair and legitimate limits," said the magazine *Agriculture,* which had heretofore maintained a correct free-trade position.[96] The *Agricultural Economist,* though more hesitant, was moving in the same direction.[97] James Lowther was asking for 10*s.* on corn, and W. J. Harris, Algernon Borthwick, Lord Brabourne, and the Duke of Rutland were not far behind.[98] In December, 1887, the Central Chambers of Agriculture voted, 20 to 6, "that, in the opinion of the Chambers, a reform of the present fiscal system with foreign nations and the colonies is urgently needed."[99] Fair Traders were literally overwhelmed by the response; for once they had encountered more protectionist feeling than they knew how to handle. *Fair Trade* complained that there were, among farmers, many extremists who desired protection against imperial and foreign competition alike; and Edgecome had to warn them that it was only "for the sake of carrying the commercial federation of the Empire, which always obtained sympathy from an audience, that a policy of import duties on food products was likely to be accepted by the nation."[100]

Had not the Irish question broken the parties loose from their moorings, this agitation of the eighties might have gone much farther. Many farm leaders recognized, however, that protection, like other secondary issues, had to be written off the books for the

[92] A list may be compiled from *Fair Trade,* numbers ranging from Oct. 22, 1886, to Dec. 17, 1886.

[93] See above, pp. 135–36.

[94] *Fair Trade,* Sept. 10, 1886, and Oct. 22, 1886.

[95] *Times,* May 30, 1887.

[96] *Agriculture,* April 27, 1887; see also leading articles of Jan. 18 and Feb. 1, 1888, which show that the conversion has been completed.

[97] *Agricultural Economist,* Oct. 1, 1888.

[98] *Times,* Jan. 1, July 28, Aug. 13, 1885; Oct. 27, Dec. 12, 1887.

[99] *Ibid.,* Dec. 8, 1887.

[100] *Fair Trade,* Nov. 11, 1887.

duration of the Unionist alliance. "I am a Unionist first, and a protectionist afterwards," said Lowther; and he continued: "Under no circumstances should our opinions upon fiscal questions be allowed to create embarrassment in the Unionist camp." [101] Henry Chaplin, Minister of Agriculture in the Unionist Government, took the same tack. He remained a protectionist to the core, he said, but there was a time and a place for everything. Still, he had to complain when his free-trade colleagues criticized him for urging the prohibition of diseased foreign cattle. "Acknowledging as I do that Free Trade, at all events for the time being, is the accepted policy of this country, I sometimes have a difficult course to steer." [102] The pressure was apparently felt in the Central Chambers of Agriculture too, for only a few months after voting in favor of fiscal reform, the Chambers defeated a "strenuous endeavour" by protectionist members to gain control of the business committee. Only one Fair Trader was admitted to a committee of eight. Lowther, whose protectionist speeches had become a feature of Chamber meetings, chose on this occasion to absent himself.[103]

But political needs, however imperative, could not hide the suffering of farmers; and in the nineties, "that sad, very sad subject of agricultural distress" [104] asserted itself with renewed force. After ten years of reasonably good weather, England endured a prolonged drought in 1893; heavy rains in 1894; and drought again in 1895.[105] Meanwhile, the import of wheat ran as follows: an annual average of 79 million cwts. for the three-year period 1887–89; 89 million for 1890–92; and 99 million for 1893–95.[106] Henry Chaplin said the depression in Lincoln was the worst in history.[107] Farmers were calling many local conferences, where protection was one of the favorite topics.[108] The *St. James's Gazette* proposed a "National Loaf League," consisting of consumers who would purchase nothing but a standard English loaf, and of bakers who would supply them with it.[109] Lowther, who had behaved rather well under the exigencies of the alliance with Liberal Unionists, could now keep silent no longer: "Whatever euphemism might be

[101] *Times,* Dec. 10, 1887.
[102] *Ibid.,* April 24, 1891.
[103] *Ibid.,* March 7 and 9, 1888.
[104] Salisbury at Brighton, *ibid.,* Nov. 20, 1895.
[105] *Parliamentary Papers,* 1897 [c. 8540], p. 6.
[106] *Ibid.,* p. 54.
[107] *Agricultural Economist,* Jan. 1, 1893.
[108] *Ibid.,* Dec. 1, 1892.
[109] *The Cable,* Sept. 28, 1895.

found expedient in some quarters," he said, "I spell protection with a big 'P.' " [110]

Nor was Lowther the only one willing to call things by their names. The findings of the Royal Commission on Agricultural Depression, which sat during the mid-nineties, show that protection was making marked gains. Glancing at random through the reports of the Assistant Commissioners, we find: in a Hampshire district, "The answer I received, in nine cases out of ten, in all parts of the district, may be summed up in the one word—'Protection.' . . . I only met two or three farmers who did not advocate Protection in one or another of its forms"; [111] in a Kentish district, a "widespread, though by no means universal, feeling in favor of Protection"; [112] in the Stratford-on-Avon district, "In all but a few instances, 'Protection' . . . is advocated as the remedy"; [113] in a Northumberland district, "Many farmers advocate fair trade"; [114] in a Lincolnshire district, unanimous agreement that free trade was the source of trouble.[115] Of the fifty-seven witnesses who discussed the tariff, a strong majority favored protection; some of these had no hope of obtaining it, however; and others confined their hopes to barley, rye, beans, etc., with perhaps a moderate duty on flour.[116] There was still great respect for the power of the cry "dear loaf," but considerably less than in 1881, for distress was now bordering on desperation.

One sign of the times was a great conference convened late in 1892, under the auspices of the Central Chambers of Agriculture.[117] Despite Chaplin's insistence that the constituencies would not, in their present temper, permit a protectionist campaign, the conference resolved, after heated debate, "that all competing imports should pay a duty not less than the rates and taxes levied on home production." The most important action of the Conference, however, was a resolution calling for the establishment of an

agricultural union, composed of all persons of whatever class who are interested in the land of the United Kingdom, in order: 1) To give effect to such resolutions as may be passed by this conference; 2) To

110 *Times,* Dec. 14, 1895.
111 *Parliamentary Papers,* [c. 7365], pp. 16–17.
112 *Ibid.,* p. 37.
113 *Parliamentary Papers,* [c. 7372], p. 31.
114 *Ibid.,* [c. 7334], p. 93.
115 *Ibid.,* [c. 7374], p. 23.
116 *Ibid.,* [c. 8146], Digest of Evidence, under "Protection."
117 *Agricultural Economist,* Jan. 1, 1893.

frame such measures as may, from time to time, be needful in the agricultural interest; 3) To organize its members into a compact body of voters in every constituency pledged to return, without distinction of party, candidates who agree to support such measures; 4) And, generally, to promote the cooperation of all connected with the land, whether as owners, occupiers, or laborers, for the common good.

The Earl of Winchilsea, who introduced this resolution and later became the guardian angel of the proposed union, was one to reckon with. Twice returned to Parliament from Lincolnshire and careful to remain in close contact with the voters after his succession to the peerage in 1887, he had set his heart on creating a strong and unified farm movement capable of dictating terms to the grasping industrial population of the towns. His first object was to convince all classes earning their living from the land, laborers, occupiers, and owners alike, of their common interest.[118] Believing that class differences were encouraged by the undemocratic character of the Chambers of Agriculture, he decided to build anew with an all-inclusive National Agricultural Union.[119] Winchilsea was one of those who understood the meaning of the Reform Bills, and he knew what was required to start an agitation and to keep it alive. Soon after settling the details of the new organization, he launched a penny weekly entitled *The Cable,* addressed man-to-man to everyone interested in the fate of British farming.[120] Colloquial, hard-hitting leading articles, appearing over a facsimile of Winchilsea's signature, promised farmers that when they learned to pull together they would wield the strongest political force in the kingdom.[121]

Did the National Agricultural Union endorse protection for British farmers? The Conference of December, 1892, had passed a protectionist resolution, and one of the stated objects of the Union was to "give effect to such resolutions as may be passed by this conference." That might appear to have ended the matter. But Winchilsea, betraying some doubt as to the Union's power to fend entirely for itself, was reluctant to take a strong position. At the second annual conference, admitting his personal belief in protection, he went on to say:

[118] *Agricultural Economist,* May 1, 1893. [119] *Ibid.,* March 1, 1893.

[120] When the first number appeared, March 25, 1893, it was called the *National Agricultural Union Cable;* but after July 15 of that year, merely *The Cable.*

[121] *National Agricultural Union Cable,* March 25, 1893.

When I am asked as a practical point, acting as your outlook committee as it were for this great movement, whether I recommend agriculturists to put upon their program a return to protective duties, I say unhesitatingly that I do not. . . . I would respectfully advise this Congress, that this should be left an open question, upon which every member of the Union is free to hold whatever opinion he chooses.

He conceded that the day might come when foreign competition would be so great that farmers would have to ask for protection. But he urged that if they first exhausted every alternative, their case would be twenty times stronger. For the time being, he said, "We had better, as a Union, leave this question alone. If it is to come, let it come from the great centers of population, and then let us be ready to say 'what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander.' . . . If there is to be protection at all, it must be protection all around." [122] Accepting Winchilsea's argument, the Conference asked Parliament merely "to modify certain existing duties for the purpose of revenue where this can be done without increasing the price the consumer pays." Another resolution asked for better treatment at the hands of railroads, charging that preferential rates to foreign producers amounted to "nothing less than a bounty on foreign corn." [123] Despite Winchilsea's efforts to evade the issue, mention of protection continued to crop out at annual Union conferences and in the correspondence columns of *The Cable,* indicating that in all probability the protectionist resolution of 1892 continued, during the next three years at least, to represent majority opinion.

One is perhaps entitled to wonder how much of Winchilsea's restraint was due to political necessity. He was, after all, a staunch Conservative, and after 1892, as we have seen, the Conservative Party abruptly dropped proposals for tariff reform. In 1895, Salisbury told a delegation of protectionist hop growers that the issue was not the "mere question of imports or no imports" and that "speaking as one desirous of judging the political forces of the time," he could not honestly hold out any prospect of farm protec-

122 *The Cable,* Dec. 16, 1893.

123 *Agricultural Economist,* Jan. 1, 1894. James Edgecome conceded that it was the part of wisdom for the N.A.U. to stay clear of controversial topics; but noted that the Union's speakers were all protectionists and that the great majority of members still supported, in all probability, the protectionist motion of 1892. See *Fair Trade Manual,* ed. by James Edgecome.

tion. When this brought murmurs from the deputation, he added: "That is, I am aware, very cold comfort. . . . I do not speak it in any way to our exclusive credit, or as claiming any special merit at your hands; but it comes from the construction of the Government." [124]

Indeed, as one farm laborer complained, " 'Protection' is an ugly word"; but "if we only had a Beaconsfield to coin some word to catch on, I can assure you that three parts of the laborers of England would turn their attention to that very thing." [125] Perhaps a new term was needed, for James Lowther, urging "protection with a big 'P,' " did not advance very far. When he raised the subject in the Central Chambers of Agriculture in 1895, members voted, 26 to 11, that the time was inopportune for a discussion of tariffs.[126]

Lowther admitted that public opinion was not yet ready to abandon free trade; [127] but as for "the great mass of those engaged in agriculture," he said, there was "a very decided conviction that the fiscal system required altering in a protectionist sense." [128] He had no desire to embarrass the Government, but he was convinced that if public opinion were aroused, the Government would quickly respond.[129] Accordingly, in 1895, he called a conference of "protectionist gentlemen," including Lloyd, Cropley, David Evans, W. J. Harris, Tipper, and Guerrier. The presence of these men and the support of Masham and Vincent suggest that Lowther was seeking to build more than a farm movement. He was, in fact, reviving Fair Trade with an agricultural bias; and the old imperial program and the old faces were there.[130] The conference voted to send a note to the new Colonial Minister, endorsing his recent action in behalf of inter-British trade and expressing the hope that it would "be speedily followed by the establishment of preferential trade relations between all parts of the British Empire." [131]

The "protectionist gentlemen" knew their man. The new Colonial Minister was Joseph Chamberlain.

[124] *Times,* Nov. 23, 1895.
[125] Aubertin's speech to N.A.U. Conference, *The Cable,* Dec. 21, 1895.
[126] *Times,* April 4, 1895.
[127] *Ibid.,* Sept. 7, 1895.
[128] *Ibid.,* Nov. 12, 1895.
[129] *Ibid.,* Dec. 14, 1895.
[130] The *Times* reported the first meeting under the heading "Fair Trade." *Ibid.,* Sept. 7, 1895.
[131] *Ibid.,* Dec. 14, 1895.

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